

Figures of Clarity: Three Poets' Voyage toward an Intelligible Poetics.

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ABSTRACT

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The 1910 polemic on the “crisis of Symbolism” began when the Symbolist poet Viacheslav Ivanov read a lecture entitled the “Precepts of Symbolism.” This lecture initiated a lively debate on the status of this prominent literary movement, to which many of the leading literary figures of the Silver Age contributed. Although the “crisis of Symbolism” has garnered a great deal of scholarly interest, an important aspect of this debate has remained unexplored. Ivanov’s lecture contained an attack on the notion of clarity, which he interpreted as the word’s “transparency” to reason. He argued that language is neither an adequate expression of thought, nor an accurate representation of “reality.” The lecture was itself a polemical response to a brief article written by Ivanov’s friend, Mikhail Kuzmin, and entitled “On Beautiful Clarity: Notes on Prose.” Published a few months before Ivanov’s lecture, this essay urged respect for the word, advocated such Classical values as precision, economy of means and clarity of expression.

Both “On Beautiful Clarity” and the “Precepts of Symbolism” appeared at a time when pervasive loss of faith in the communicative power of language combined with the sense of social and cultural malaise led to a profound crisis that far exceeded the ranks of the Symbolists. Between 1910 and 1917, a number of Russian writers and thinkers proclaimed the word “dead” and offered programs for its revival. For Ivanov, clarity was an Enlightenment notion that he associated with rationalism and blamed for the ills of his age. For Kuzmin, however, clarity represented poetic rather than empirical meaningfulness and had little to do with the kind of empirical “transparency” that Ivanov had in mind. Both poets were after the same goal: a poetics

that would bridge the perceived divide between the word and “reality.” Even as Ivanov argued for a language of mystical obscurity in the hope that such an idiom would restore the mystery and meaning of which he believed his age was sapped, he replaced clarity with a kind of Symbolist intelligibility and so a clarity of his own.

This dissertation examines Viacheslav Ivanov’s, Mikhail Kuzmin’s and Osip Mandelshtam’s distinct approaches to the concept of clarity as poetic sense, formulated by these poets independently as well as in response to each other. I argue that for all three poets the notion of clarity applies to the specific relationship between the poet and the word, between the image and the word, and between the semantic content and the sound within the word. Since for all three poets, clarity is associated not only with the poetic logos in general, but specifically with the heritage of European Classicism, the Classical ideal works its way into these relationships as the “image” of sense to which the poet must aspire. For each poet, poetic clarity is an explicit concept as well as an individual “model” implicit in his poetic identity.

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Note on the translation and transliteration

Throughout the dissertation, I use the Library of Congress transliteration system. In the body of the dissertation Russian names are written as they are commonly spelled in English. Genevieve Arlie translated from Russian into English in the first chapter, Kirsten Lodge in the second chapter and Margo Shohl Rosen in the third chapter.

On Beautiful Uncertainty: an Introduction

In Russia as in the West the year 1910 marked the time of great cultural upheaval. In Virginia Woolf's famous essay on Modernist literature, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," the author observed that "human character changed" "in or around" December of that year. She suggested that as a result, "all human relations" were transformed, and that "when human relations change, there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature."¹ Woolf's essay, of course, focuses on the latter.

The advent of Modernism was not quite as abrupt as Woolf suggests. Rather, it was the result of a complex, nearly pan-global process that took place over the course of the first decade of the twentieth century, now known as the "linguistic turn." Vladimir Feshchenko's monograph *Laboratory of the Logos* provides a thorough overview of international literature dedicated to this shift and outlines its origin in a "complete reevaluation of long-standing scientific and artistic traditions."² At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century these transformations were accompanied by a profound sense of crisis in society at large as well as on the level of the individual. Thomas Harrison's study *1910: The Emancipation of Dissonance* provides a vivid overview of the kind of new idiom that emerged as the result of this cultural process. The scholar believes that the year 1910 "signals the end of a Western, humanistic tradition" and "the termination of its guiding objective." According to Harrison, the prevalent idiom of the period

¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), 2-3.

² Vladimir Feshchenko, *Laboratoriia logosa: iazykovoii eksperiment v avangardnom tvorchestve* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur), 29. The author lists some of the major modernist projects that defined the "linguistic turn" of the first half of the 20th century: reconstruction of the Hebrew language, considered "dead" since the first century AD, "purification" of Turkish language, creation of literary Norwegian and Estonian languages, creation of artificial languages such as Esperanto, experimental literary movements in France, Great Britain, Russia and other countries, emergence of formalism in literature, structuralism in linguistics and ethnology, etc.

between 1908 and 1914 was predicated upon the contradiction between the drive for self-realization and the inability to overcome the pervasive sense of “self-loss” that yielded this drive in the first place. Numerous iconic texts and artworks that date to this time probe the creative potential of discord between experience and language.³ One such text is Arnold Schoenberg’s *Theory of Harmony* (1911), in which the composer outlined the process whereby he broke with the rules of consonance and embraced the language of musical discord. Harrison observes that the entire *Theory of Harmony* is “presented as though it were nothing more than an internal conversation <...> Aiming only ‘to make things clear to himself,’ the artist pursues clarity in open confusion.”⁴ According to the scholar, in the years leading up to World War I the vacuum left by the disappearance of the overarching humanist “guiding objective” inspired artists to seek subjective, personal clarity amidst “dissonance.”

In Russia the question of discord and clarity also emerged in the year 1910, where it was interpreted according to Russia’s specific historical and cultural situation. My dissertation, *Figures of Clarity: Three Poets’ Voyage toward an Intelligible Poetics*, examines the problem of clarity as it figured in the famous 1910 polemic on the “crisis of Symbolism.” Implicit in the European cultural discourse at this time, in Russia it became the subject of an extended

³ Thomas Harrison, *1910: The Emancipation of Dissonance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 1-17.

According to Harrison, some of the artists, writers and thinkers who created seminal work in and around the year 1910 are Vasily Kandinsky, Egon Schiele, Rainer Maria Rilke, Georg Trakl, Carlo Michelstaedter, Georg Simmel and Ludwig Wittgenstein, to name only a few. At this time Sigmund Freud published his foundational *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Georg Lukács produced a collection of essays *Soul and Form*, in which he argued that “form” was the distortion of “soul,” and Rudolf Steiner formulated the principles of theosophy in *An Outline of Occult Science*.

⁴ Harrison, *1910: The Emancipation of Dissonance*, 18-19.

The title of Harrison’s book derives from another text by Schoenberg: his 1926 essay “Opinion or Insight?” In this later text the composer addressed his earlier achievement, summed up in the *Theory of Harmony*, and described it as the “emancipation of dissonance.”

conversation between three poets. First among these poets is Viacheslav Ivanov, one of the leaders of the Symbolist movement, who in 1910 made the attempt to formulate a “supra-rational” poetics by arguing against the notion of clarity as he understood it. The second poet is Mikhail Kuzmin, whose essay “On Beautiful Clarity” is seminal to my research. The essay preceded the polemic by two months, prompting a polemical response from Ivanov during the debate. Kuzmin stood apart from the literary movements of his time, yet his concept of clarity goes to the heart of the challenge of his epoch. The third is Osip Mandelshtam, whose contribution to the debate of 1910 was minimal, but who returned to the theme of clarity as it was interpreted during the “crisis” in his later writings. I first examine the notion of clarity as it was discussed during the “crisis” itself and then discuss each poet’s individual approach to this idea in the years leading up to the debate and after it was long over.

During the “crisis of Symbolism” the theme of discord and clarity emerged as a reflection of the general atmosphere of the era as well as specific issues within the movement itself. In her classic *History of Russian Symbolism*, Avril Pyman describes the apocalyptic feel of the years between 1902-1910. As early as 1902 the country was rocked by a wave of revolts against land and factory owners. In 1904 the disastrous Russian-Japanese war began; in 1905 Russia’s defeat further demoralized the already discontented society. Government incompetency only exacerbated tensions. Oppressive legacy of positivist thought of the last third of the nineteenth century lingered, combined with a vague, as-yet unarticulated sense of an approaching catastrophe.⁵ In 1910 unrest and unease appear to have reached a momentary plateau: a moment of uneasy stillness before an even greater storm. One of the most prominent poets of this period, Alexander Blok painted a vivid picture of this year in the preface to his poem *Retribution*

⁵ Avril Pyman, *Istoriia russkogo simvolizma* (Moscow: Respublika, 1998), 227-250, 265-281, 309.

[*Vozmezdie*] (1911-1919). Written after the revolution, the preface describes 1910 as the time of momentous endings and important beginnings. First and foremost, Blok remembers it as the year of the deaths of three iconic Russian artists. He writes that the death of the actor Vera Komissarzhevskaya signaled the end of the “lyric note” in theater. The “immense personal world of the artist” vanished with the Symbolist painter Mikhail Vrubel. The death of Lev Tolstoy represented the “death of human tenderness” and “wise humanness” itself.⁶ For Blok, at least, the “guiding objective” still present while these artists were alive, was now gone. He lists some of the events of that year and describes the general mood of the time. He remembers this mood as permeated by a kind of “music” that his poem strives to evoke and writes of the “mystical” inebriation that accompanied premonitions of war and the revolution during this period. He recalls the sudden popularity of aviation and airshows that often resulted in fatalities and French wrestling in vogue in the circuses of Moscow and St. Petersburg. He also mentions the rampant anti-Semitism unleashed by the murder of a Russian child and the subsequent Beilis trial in Kiev, and the murder of Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin. Blok’s recollections are disconcerting and filled with references to violence. He writes that, “the scent of smoke, metal and blood was already in the air.”⁷ A catastrophe appeared to have begun, yet its exact nature was still unknown.

Blok was one of the most famous participants of the Symbolist movement, which by 1910 had been central in Russian literary life for nearly two decades. The Symbolists comprised two groups: the “older” poets, such as Valery Briusov, Dmitri Merezhkovsky, Fyodor Sologub and Konstantin Balmont among others, began to publish as early as 1892 and formed a well-

⁶ Aleksandr Blok, *Vozmezdie. Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh*, 20 vols. (Moscow: Nauka, 1999), 5:48. Hereafter cited as *PSS*.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5:48.

established literary movement by 1895. The “young” Symbolists, Blok, Andrei Bely and Viacheslav Ivanov, entered the literary arena only around the turn of the century, as the self-proclaimed pupils of the religious philosopher Vladimir Solovyov.⁸ While the theme of the apocalypse was popular with both groups, they interpreted it differently.⁹ The “old” poets, especially Briusov as their leading figure, considered themselves decadents and aesthetes. They viewed their own decadence and the general state of perceived decline around them strictly in historical, social and aesthetic terms. Associating their version of Symbolism with its European counterpart, they believed their “decadence” to be a historically relevant, innovative approach to literature. Indeed, in Russia their movement was the first Modern poetic movement. Unlike them, the “young” Symbolists believed that their mission was essentially spiritual. In the preface to *Retribution* Blok mentioned the excitement with which these poets discussed the advent of a redemptive, mystical poetics that would reconcile fractured spheres of religion, art and history. Through the power of the poetic word, they consciously sought to catalyze a spiritual transformation in “human character” and “all relations.”

The difference in these two groups’ views on the role and meaning of poetry eventually contributed to a debate on the issue of “crisis,” which Blok recalled in his preface as the most

⁸ Viacheslav Ivanov’s age—he was born in 1866—should have made him an “older” Symbolist, indeed, one of the “oldest,” but his views and the time he began to publish his writing allied him with Blok and Bely, both fourteen years his junior.

⁹ In his “Apocalypse in Russian Fiction,” David Bethea writes: “In terms of richness and breadth of apocalyptic literature, there is little to compare in the Russian context with the Symbolist period and with the theme of “last things” in the many novels, stories, poems, essays and philosophical causeries of Vladimir Solov’ev, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, Vasilii Rozanov, Valerii Briusov, Maksimilian Voloshin, Aleksandr Blok, Andrey Belyi, and others.” David M. Bethea, “Apocalypse in Russian Fiction,” *Issues in Russian Literature before 1917: Selected Papers on the Third World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies*, ed. J. Douglas Clayton (Columbus: Slavica, 1989), 176-195, 180.

Some examples are Blok’s 1902 poem “Veru v solntse zaveta,” a famous Symbolist rendering of the apocalyptic theme. Blok, *PSS*, 1:95. Another example is Bely’s essay “Apokalipsis v russkoi poezii.” Andrei Belyi, “Apokalipsis v russkoi poezii,” *Vesy* 4 (April 1905): 11-28.

memorable literary event of the year 1910. This most memorable event in the ranks of a movement, central to the life of Russian letters at this time, formally focused on the issue of the poet's social and philosophical mission. Just beneath the surface, however, lay the equally if not more pressing problem of "dissonance" and clarity. The debate commenced in March, after Viacheslav Ivanov delivered a lecture, later published under the title "The Precepts of Symbolism," first in Moscow and then in St. Petersburg. It reverberated on the pages of St. Petersburg and Moscow journals for the duration of that year and even in 1911. Although according to Tomas Venclova, the lecture was a recapitulation of ideas that Ivanov already expressed elsewhere over the course of the decade, this time these ideas resonated differently.¹⁰ Unlike in the previous years, Ivanov consciously tried to give direction to a movement that suddenly appeared to have none. His most immediate opponent and interlocutor was Valery Briusov, whom the "younger" Symbolists sought to "convert" to their interpretation of Symbolism throughout the 1900s.¹¹ By 1910, Briusov had become disillusioned with the movement altogether. In his view, not only Symbolism, but Russian poetry in general entered an entropic state. Several weeks before the polemic began he wrote to Ivanov: "So far as I can judge, complete disintegration reigns. Former alliances and circles have all fallen apart. Former ruling ideas are worn out—and there are no new ones."¹² In practical terms, this stagnation and

¹⁰ Tomas Venclova mentions specifically the following essays: "Poet i chern'," (1904), "Kop'e Afiny," (1904), "Simvolika esteticheskikh nachal," (1905) "Krizis individualizma," (1905), "O veselom remesle i umnom veselii," (1907), "Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme" (1908). Tomas Venclova, "Viacheslav Ivanov and the Crisis of Russian Symbolism," *Issues in Russian Literature before 1917: Selected Papers on the Third World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies*, 205-209, 206.

¹¹ In the wake of Ivanov's lecture the polemic comprised a great number of articles by nearly every important literary figure of the time, not only Briusov. I address some of the specifics of this exchange in my first chapter.

¹² I quote the letter from Joan Delaney Grossman's "Briusov's Defense of Poetry."

discord led, for example, to the closing of nearly all Symbolist publications, at a time when magazines were of great importance. In 1909 the Moscow Symbolist journal *Vesy*, over which Briusov presided, and Andrei Bely's *Zolotoe Runo* ceased to exist. Briusov dismissed Bely's new publishing endeavor, *Musaget*, as inconsequential and placed equally little faith in the important St. Petersburg publication *Apollon*. Not only was he convinced that Symbolism has run its course, but he saw no potential in the younger generation of poets, Symbolist or not.¹³ The sense of confusion and loss of direction appeared to be pervasive.

In his lecture, Ivanov also addressed the problem, but unlike Briusov, he insisted on a solution. Describing the state of "dissonance" that had descended upon the Symbolists, he wrote: "One discerned cries of utter despair in the writings of Z.N. Gippius, Fyodor Sologub, Aleksandr Blok, Andrei Bely. Sun-like, free man became but a worm, crushed in the presence of chaos <...> The Paladin dreamt that his Beautiful Lady is a "cardboard bride." The image of the beloved Bride took on the distinct appearance of a whore."¹⁴ Ivanov defined chaos not only as a state of depletion of values and ideals, but also as the blurring of distinctions between opposites. For him, this was a tremendous source of inspiration. When the very bedrock of order—the juxtapositions upon which it rests—is undone, the poet embarks on an essentially religious mission. His transcendent vision *also* blurs distinctions between opposites. The Symbolist poet transcends contradiction so as to discern the absolute within the merely phenomenal, and overcomes "dissonance" not by imposing order on it, but by acknowledging it as a sacred

Joan Delaney Grossman, "Briusov's Defense of Poetry," *Issues in Russian Literature before 1917: Selected Papers on the Third World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies*, 196-204, 199. Briusov's letter is published as "Perepiska s Viacheslavom Ivanovym (1903-1923)," in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 85, 525-525.

¹³ J.D. Grossman, 206.

¹⁴ V. Ivanov, "Zavety simvolizma," *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols, ed. D.V. Ivanov and O. Deschartes (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971-1987), 2:589-603. Hereafter *SS*. The lecture was published as an essay in *Apollon* 8 (May-June 1910): 5-20.

spiritual principle and developing an idiom that accommodates this knowledge. Ivanov blamed “individualism,” of which he accused European Symbolism as well as Briusov’s aestheticism and decadence, for the poet’s inability to pursue this mission. An “individualist,” entrapped by his limiting and arrogant self-reliance, could never supersede contradiction.

In the “Precepts,” Ivanov references the concept of clarity in the context of his critique of “individualism.” Although he associates this concept with the general problem of aestheticism, which he believes to fall short of his program of mystical poetics, in this case his criticism is not directed specifically at Briusov, but at Mikhail Kuzmin, whose essay “On Beautiful Clarity: Notes on Prose” appeared in the fourth issue of *Apollon* in January 1910, just two months before Ivanov’s lecture. At this time Kuzmin was at the height of his fame as a poet and prose writer. Although he knew many of the Symbolists and was on friendly terms with Ivanov as well as Briusov, he was not a Symbolist himself. Indeed, he maintained and underscored his independence from any of the literary movements of his time. His brief article was a critique in its own right. Admonishing those, who, in his opinion, misused language and targeting especially some of the “young” Symbolists, the author proffered his understanding of what constitutes good style. The final statement of the essay is particularly relevant to the subject of clarity as it reemerges in Ivanov’s “Precepts.” Kuzmin wrote: “But the way of art is long, and life is short, and so I wonder—are not all these exhortations only good wishes for myself alone?”¹⁵ The focus on the self in the very last sentence contrasts with the body of the text, where Kuzmin addresses an audience and speak in general terms. This ending reminds the reader that the “rules” of good style are, ultimately, a subjective consideration. Evocative of Schonberg’s approach in his 1910

¹⁵ The essay was first published in *Apollon* 4 (January 1910): 5-10. Here, I quote John Barnstead’s translation. M. Kuzmin and John A. Barnstead. “On Beautiful Clarity: Notes on Prose.” *Russian Language Journal*, vol. 40, no. 136/137, 1986, pp. 201–205.

Theory of Harmony, Kuzmin presented his ideas as if they were nothing more than “an internal conversation.” As he asserted that “beautiful clarity” is a matter of personal taste, he also preempted any attempt at a programmatic reading of his essay. Such a conclusion represented a rebuke to Ivanov’s proselytizing zeal. Yet the first-person narrator who states the self-reflexive nature of his statement in the final sentence of Kuzmin’s essay is hardly a frivolous individualist. He is “constructed” according to the Classical aesthetic code that the author espouses. In fact, in the body of the essay Kuzmin criticizes those authors, who idiosyncratically “distort” their narratives and language as their medium to the detriment of their texts’ communicability and aesthetic value. “On Beautiful Clarity” subtly poses the question as to who its narrator might be.

Ivanov understood “clarity” as an assertion of “individualism” instead of its transcendence. He referred to it as: “the word’s adequacy, its sufficiency with respect to the demands of reason, the communicability of ‘beautiful clarity’ that could, if it wanted to, always achieve transparency, if it didn’t prefer to— dissemble.”¹⁶ Kuzmin’s subjective clarity (as well as Briusov’s decadent aestheticism) amounted to a “renunciation of habitual flights in the empyrean and supra-subjective perceptions—a capitulation in the face of the present “given” reality.” In poetry such a capitulation “leads to “beautiful clarity”: the lapidary craft that lovingly elevates all that is “beautiful” in this [...] most literary of all worlds to the status of the “pearl of existence.” Ivanov believed to be living during a period of the Symbolist “antithesis”—a time, when poets experienced temptation to use their writing to further the depravity of the world rather than achieve “transparency” and transcend it.¹⁷ He rebuked Briusov’s decadence as

¹⁶ Ivanov, *SS* 2:593.

¹⁷ Avril Pyman describes the Symbolist “antithesis” as the apocalyptic years of 1904-1910. In the “Precepts” Ivanov obviously tries to set up a dialectic between the Symbolist “thesis”—a period of revelation and “transparency”: a new depth discovered by the Symbolists—followed by the

dwelling on the "dissonance" and Kuzmin's "clarity" as capitulation before an illusion. Both represented surrender to temptation.

For both Ivanov and Kuzmin, the concept of clarity drew together the notion of the subject, or the lyric "self," and language. Ivanov's rejection of "clarity" is, in effect a rejection of a specific historical definition of the relationship between these two concepts. Ivanov blamed the "death of the word"—a popular topic in the first half of the 1910s—on the hyper-rational "Western" mind.¹⁸ He was not the only one to associate this type of mentality with Humanism. After World War I and the 1917 revolution the "demise of Humanism" replaced the "death of the word" as the leitmotif of the time.¹⁹ But Ivanov and the "young" Symbolists anticipated the break-down of this specific paradigm of the "self" well in advance of these cataclysmic historical events. As Avril Pyman writes in her "Russian Symbolists and the Renaissance," their version of Humanism had little to do with the original Italian movement, which they viewed through the lens of nineteenth-century positivism and materialism, Enlightenment rationalism and European Neoclassical movements.²⁰ They condemned it as an expression of arrogant individualism and self-reliance, and blind faith in the superiority of the mind. "Clarity" as it figures in the

"antithesis," and concluded by the anticipated "synthesis." Avril Pyman, *Istoriia russkogo simvolizma*, 227-250, 265-281, 309.

¹⁸ Some of the famous texts on this subject are the Futurists' "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste" (1912), Viktor Shklovsky's "The Resurrection of the Word" (1914), Bely's *Na Perevale* (probably 1917). As early as 1908 Rosanov describes the death of words in his *Fallen Leaves* in *Izbrannoe* (Munich: Neimanis, 1970) 87.

¹⁹ For example: Vyacheslav Ivanov's "On the Crisis of Humanism" (1918), Aleksander Blok's "On the Demise of Humanism" (1919), Osip Mandelstam's "Humanism and the Present" (1922), Nikolai Berdyaev's treatise *The Meaning of History* (1923) discusses the topic at length, and Andrey Bely's essays "Crisis of Life", "Crisis of Thought" and "Crisis of Culture" displayed a variety of attitudes toward Humanism as a historical fact, yet unanimously identified this term with a historical period that has either come to an end or was undergoing a profound transformation.

²⁰ Avril Pyman, "Russkie simvolisty i Vozrozhdenie," *Vestnik russkoi khristianskoi gumanitarnoi akademii* 13 (2012) 79-94, 80.

“Precepts” is therefore a signifier of rational intelligibility and “individualist” worldview that Ivanov sought to transcend.

Ivanov’s “Precepts” failed to give Symbolism a viable program of action: Symbolism as a cohesive creative phenomenon ended in 1910. In the preface to *Retribution*, Blok observed that the poetic movements that swept in to replace it in the course of the next several years—Acmeism, Ego-Futurism and Futurism—tendered their own versions of a “new man,” or as Blok phrased it, the “new Adam,” one that he deemed void of the “humanness.” Although most of the “young” Symbolists went on to create some of their most important works after the “crisis,” they did so independently of any movement.

But the essay’s failure as a program of action was in itself an eloquent statement of the problem of the time. Ivanov’s attack on the notion of “clarity” in particular goes to the heart of the challenge to transform “self-loss” into “self-transcendence.” In Russian the word and the self converge in the word *iasnost’*. Like its English (*clarity*), French (*clarté*) and Latin (*clarus*) equivalents, *iasnost’* derives from and is associated with vividness, brightness, illumination and light.²¹ In Russian, however, there is an additional association, unrelated to etymology, with the word “ia,” or the “self.”²² The three poets who became involved in an extended conversation on the subject of clarity reckoned with the disappearance of what Harrison calls the humanist “guiding objective” by formulating their individual versions of a “supra-subjective” poetics. But while Kuzmin and Mandelshtam acknowledged and valorized the subjective premise of this

²¹ “clear, adj., adv., and n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2017, www.oed.com/view/Entry/34078. Accessed 6 December 2017;

Dal’, V.I. 1801-1872. *Tolkovyĭ slovar zhivogo Velikorusskogo iazyka Vladimira Dalia. Tret’e ispravlennoe i znachitel’no dopolnennoe*, 4 vols (St. Petersburg: M.O. Vol’f, 1903-1909) 1584.

²² Andrei Bely makes much of this association in his prose poem *Glossolalia*, addressed at length in the third chapter of this study.

effort, Ivanov attempted to voice a “spiritual” objectivity and mystical “knowing” beyond subjective intelligibility.

My inquiry into these three poets’ distinct versions of clarity reveals that this notion pertains to their views on the origins of the poetic utterance as a “supra-subjective” phenomenon, and so three versions of a poetic “self.” I contend that Ivanov’s, Kuzmin’s and Mandelshtam’s understanding of clarity is predicated upon two fundamentally different perspectives on the purpose of language and origin of meaning. Contrary to Ivanov’s own statement against correspondence of the word to its meaning, he predicated his poetics on the notion of an objective truth to which the Symbolist idiom had to correspond. This stable “premise” of his writing represented “spiritual” objectivity, reached by means of mystical “knowing” beyond subjective intelligibility. The idiom that emerged from such insight was, in his words, “transparent” to contradiction. Yet in his poetics clarity and obscurity remained a mutually exclusive binary pair, indicating that Ivanov interpreted the term “clarity” conceptually, as a rational processes and a property of individualistic reason. In other words, Ivanov understood the word “clarity”—as well as the concept of “obscurity”—only in the way against which he argued. Conceptual definition preceded the experience of the word.

Although Kuzmin’s and Mandelshtam’s writing is based on very different, often conflicting aesthetic principles, both poets viewed the word itself as the premise of a “supra-subjective” poetics. The poetic logos did not correspond to preceding concepts, but rearticulated them and created new meaning. Since the word was not the product of meaning, but its catalyst, it was essentially metaphoric. Self-transcendence, therefore, occurred in self-representation. For this reason, rather than posit a mystery beyond experience and intellection, Kuzmin’s poetry draws attention to the concept of clarity as enigmatic in itself: the process of understanding is

difficult to address except metaphorically. The word “clarity,” etymologically and historically associated with light, suggests that to understand is to see and vice versa. Not only is clarity not superseded in poetry, but it appears to be its basic principle. The “clarity” of Mandelstam’s poetry is more than enigmatic, since it presents itself even in those poems whose meaning seems to be entirely opaque. In his poetics, clarity, not obscurity, is the “transcendent” principle.

The history of the distinction between these two views on clarity predates the “crisis of Symbolism” by centuries and pertains to the long-standing argument between philosophy and rhetoric.²³ This history implicitly informed the discussion on the “crisis of Symbolism,” as well as Ivanov’s, Kuzmin’s and Mandelstam’s individual interpretations of it, and determined some of its core questions. The argument concerned the purpose and origin of language. The Greek philosophers—most famously, Plato—held that thought was capable of attaining objective truths that resided beyond language, and that thought was therefore superior to rhetoric. Language had to serve thought in its search for indisputable truths. Conversely, rhetoricians believed that no truths were indisputable, and that the purpose of language was to sway minds. They argued that what appeared to be an “objective” truth today could appear false tomorrow: since the mind always operates within the framework of time and space, it is limited in its ability to know. Rhetoric accounted for this inevitable fluctuation of the “truth” by emphasizing the ability to convince the audience of *a* truth by means of language.²⁴ The ability to use language effectively

²³ A number of the texts I address in this dissertation are prose. However, since it is prose written by poets and since it also either reflects on the subject of “supra-subjective” writing, I classify it as “poetic.”

²⁴ The Italian philosopher Ernesto Grassi developed the idea of rhetoric as a philosophy in its own right. Most of his work pertains not only to classical antiquity but also its interpretation and elaboration by Italian Humanists, especially the Giambattista Vico as the last Humanist. Grassi argues that Cicero was the one to formulate the idea that: “the historical aspects of the realization

was considered a divine gift. In his “The Rhetorical Ideal of Antiquity and the Culture of the Renaissance,” Sergei Averintsev describes these two opposing ways of thought as fundamental components of the culture of antiquity. He writes that both philosophy and rhetoric originated in one archaic discipline that still remained intact in the time of the Sophists and suggests that residual memory of this original unity motivated each discipline to compete with the other for the right to claim itself uniquely capable of reconciling the division between thought and the word.²⁵

The argument between the philosophers and the orators resurfaced time and again throughout history: in the Middle Ages, during the Italian Renaissance Humanist movement and in Modern times.²⁶ Although each instance of its reemergence responded to specific historical circumstances and was important in its own right, its reappearance during the Renaissance has unique significance. During this time Classical rhetorical texts—especially Cicero—were rediscovered. Rhetoric gave rise to Classical philology and began to inform literature. It is likewise important that at this time the visual arts began to be associated with and interpreted as rhetoric. As concrete visual reality began to attract attention, and the image gained the status of

of the mind are never eternally valid, never absolutely “true,” because they always emerge within limited situations bound in space and time; i.e. they are probable and seem to be true <...> only within the confines of “here” and “now,” in which the needs and problems that confront human beings are met.” Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 10.

²⁵ Sergei Averintsev, “Antichnyi ritoricheskii ideal i kul’tura Vozrozhdeniia,” *Ritorika i istoki evropeiskoi literaturnoi traditsii* (Moscow: Shkola “Iazyki russkoi kul’tury,” 1996), 347-363, 352.

²⁶ Ibid., A famous debate on this topic is the 15th century “Res-verbum Controversy” that culminated in the dispute between the “philosopher” Pico della Mirandola and the “orator” Ermolao Barbaro.

the word, the “original” unity of thought and language became a *topos* that could be represented visually²⁷

During this extended controversy, both the philosophers and the rhetoricians contributed a great deal to each other’s disciplines. Clarity was one of the concepts that eventually became important in both “camps.” When in the first century A.D. the rhetorician Quintilian developed the concept of “clarity”—in Latin, *perspicuitas*—to identify the property of intelligibility, he was influenced by Aristotle and the Stoic philosophers.²⁸ But whereas the Stoics as well as Aristotle applied the concept of clarity to “perceptual cognitive impressions,” Quintilian measured it by how clear speech seemed to the audience or how well it appealed logically to the understanding.²⁹ For him, clarity as “cognitive grasp” was closely related to the concept of *evidencia*: the ability to envision the subject matter as an image in the mind’s eye. In the 17th century, the rhetorical technique of making the audience see clearly what is not present in actuality informed Rene Descartes’ philosophical doctrine of “clear and distinct ideas.”³⁰ Descartes other major contribution to the history of the term is the subject proper. In his

²⁷ Ibid., 353-357. Averintsev provides several examples. He writes that the epithet “divino” was reserved in antiquity for the Caesar, the best orators and the best philosophers. Throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages the visual artist was relegated to the status of a craftsman no matter how great his achievements. During the Renaissance, however, Michelangelo becomes “divino,” and figures such as Leon Battista Alberti are respected for their ability to write, paint and design. Averintsev points out, however, that during antiquity there were some exceptional cases, when a prominent Sophist would be praised for his ability to make material objects (such as clothes). This was nearly unprecedented and occurred only within the ranks of the Sophists, i.e. those who traditionally did not separate thought and language.

²⁸ Stephen Gaukroger, “Descartes’ Early Doctrine of Clear and Distinct Ideas,” *The Genealogy of Knowledge: Analytical Essays in the History of Philosophy and Science* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1997), 138.

²⁹ Gaukroger, 136-137; Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, Trans. H. E. Butler. (London: W. Heinemann, 1920-22), 61-71.

³⁰ Descartes studied rhetoric with the Jesuits at La Flèche. He was fascinated with the discipline and tried to incorporate it into his philosophy in his early work especially. In his mature period he turned away from it. Although he borrowed “clarity” from rhetoric, he applied it in the context of his philosophical method. Gaukroger, 143-144.

Meditations, for example, the thinker seeks the “objective” truth by dispelling his personal doubt instead of convincing an external audience. The question of how to attain certainty gave rise to a lucid philosophical method, yet lost none of its original appeal as a question. With Descartes, clarity became enigmatic.

Descartes’ method inspired Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), who, according to Grassi, concluded the tradition of rhetoric as a philosophy in its own right. Marcel Danesi writes that while Vico admired Descartes in his youth, in his *New Science* he polemicized with the rationalist philosopher.³¹ While the polemic was a revival of the old controversy between the philosophers and the orators, the two thinkers shared the self-reflexive impulse. Vico’s alternative to the discipline of philosophy was a “new science” of the human mind. He argued that such a science had to develop from the study of human history, rather than philosophy.³² He posited that the mind is capable of knowing only what it has created and what is inherent in it. Philosophical, logical, mathematical and scientific “objective” truths, such as the laws of Euclidean geometry, “are not inherent in the universe. Rather, they constitute humanity’s cognitive strategy for organizing and rationalizing visual sensations.”³³ As Vico looked for the origin of human consciousness within myths and etymologies of words, he developed a theory that metaphor underlies the mind’s ability to make conceptual meaning. He believed that the mind first transformed external stimuli into iconic signs and then made connections between them. Finally, by means of metaphor, it transformed “iconic deep structures of thought” into “surface cognitive form.” For Vico, this was not a one-time event, but a continuous cognitive process. He believed that the mind was constantly involved in “converting precepts into

³¹ Marcel Danesi, *Vico, Metaphor, and the Origin of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 17.

³² Ibid., 43.

³³ Ibid., 47.

concepts.”³⁴ Although Vico never used the term “clarity” to describe this process, perhaps because it was so strongly associated with Descartes’ philosophy of certainty, his theory of metaphor is an interpretation of this notion within the parameters of rhetoric as a philosophy. As Vico determined that the unique characteristic of human reason was to think metaphorically, he was able to envision a rhetorical figure as an intrinsic structure of thought: a *topos* of the mind. Philosophical objectivity became only a construct of the mind’s innate creative drive.

The history of the concept of clarity informs some of the basic issues that emerged in the conversation on this subject between Ivanov, Kuzmin and Mandelshtam. First among them is the fact that during the “dissonant” years of the “crisis of Symbolism,” the ancient problem of division between thought and language once again presented itself with great urgency. Ivanov’s “Precepts” stated the problem and offered a solution: a “supra-subjective” poetics that would heal this divide. The term “clarity” as it appears in my dissertation pertains to this notion of “supra-subjectivity.” I argue that although Ivanov objected to the principle of clarity as both philosophical and rhetorical intelligibility or “cognitive grasp,” in effect, his model of Symbolism was based on the premise of philosophical “objectivity.” While he promoted the poetics of “obscurity,” which conveyed mystical insight by constantly evoking its ineffability, he viewed language itself as meaningful only to the extent that it was based on an absolute mystical principle beyond itself. To overcome the self (and clarity as “cognitive grasp”) was to achieve a different, “supra-subjective” kind of intelligibility and a superior “clarity.”

For Kuzmin and Mandelshtam, conversely, unity of thought and language could be achieved only within language. The two poets’ interpretation of this basic “rhetorical” premise

³⁴ Ibid., 56.

is, however, vastly different. Kuzmin really did view art as, in Ivanov's words, the "pearl of existence." Poetry was a self-enclosed and self-sufficient sphere of "clarity"; and poetic language was a purely aesthetic phenomenon. As such, it included philosophy, ethics and spirituality. Mandelshtam's poetics, however, was also a kind of civic discourse, inseparable from history. The poetic logos had to engage with the specifics of its "time and place." For these poets, the realization of "supra-subjectivity" in their writing proceeded within the framework of aesthetics and in open dialog with history respectively.

Both the "philosophers" and the "rhetoricians" viewed their disciplines as deriving from an authentic, original language wherein thought and the word were not divided. For Ivanov, Kuzmin and Mandelshtam the term clarity pertains to the idea of an "original" language in several ways. First, it is associated with a specific historical tradition that initiates in Greek antiquity and reverberates throughout the history of the European Classical tradition. Roman antiquity, Italian Renaissance, especially its Tuscan variant, 17th century French Neoclassicism and Weimar Classicism all represent instances of clarity that reinterpreted the original Greek idea.³⁵ Furthermore, Ivanov's "obscure" principle of intelligibility was based on the idea of "recollection" of the "original" myth. Notably, for all three poets the visual legacy of the Italian Renaissance represents the period when the concept of clarity found its equivalent in pictorial

³⁵ Of course, the Russian literary tradition was not any less important, clarity emerges as a signifier of the foreign. For example, while Alexander Pushkin's poetry represented the quintessence of clarity for all three poets, it was "clear" in so far as it adapted the idea of clarity for the Russian language and in the context of the Russian literary tradition. Ivanov differs from the other two poets in that while "clarity" represented for him the legacy of a Western mentality, he based his alternative concept of poetic intelligibility on the poetics of the Russian Romantics, especially Fyodor Tyutchev. While he traced the "origin" of this line of thought to Greek antiquity, in his scholarly treatise, *Dionysus and Pre-Dionysianism*, he also claimed that Dionysus—the Greek deity and representation of his obscure original principle—was originally a Thracian and, therefore, a Slavic god. Nevertheless, most of his references to both the principle of an "obscure" clarity and the principle of rational intelligibility evoke European Classicism and Romanticism.

representation.³⁶ Three kinds of clarity (in Ivanov's case, both his own, "mystical" version and what he considered the illusory "intelligibility") find their parallel especially in the depictions that demonstrate the art of perspective.³⁷ For the three poets, these become emblematic of the inherent enigma of "clarity" as well as this concept as a signifier of a culturally "foreign" locus.

Second, not only is the poetics of clarity an iteration of the "original" ideal, but it is also a primary "structure" that yields poetic meaning by defining the fundamental relationships between the poetic "self" and the poetic word, and between the image and the word. The latter relationship is also applicable to the relationship between the signified and the signifier, but among the three poets only Mandelshtam makes this idea explicit in his theoretical writing. While meaning can be construed in numerous ways, the poetics of Ivanov, Kuzmin and Mandelshtam is based on one such cardinal relationship that each of the poets understands as quintessentially "clear." This relationship is metonymic for Ivanov, who represents himself as connected to the hypothetical, principal antecedent, and metaphoric for Kuzmin and Mandelshtam, who both, albeit in very different ways, represent themselves as transformed in the

³⁶ Mandelshtam's description of "domestic Hellenism" in his essay "On the Nature of the Word" illustrates this idea. He writes of Hellenism as the "purposefulness" and "teleological warmth" of the objects that serve in our daily rituals. As he addresses the idea of culture, especially language, as a "home," he implicitly likens words to earthenware. Beautiful and convincing as this comparison is, it would not have been possible for an ancient Greek. Such a metaphor is possible only after the era that elevated craft and visual art in general to the status of rhetoric and literature. Osip Mandel'shtam, "O prirode slova," in A. Mets, and V.V. Ivanov, (eds), *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress-Pleiada, 2009), 2:64-81, 68. Hereafter *PSS*.

³⁷ The word "perspective" itself implies clarity. There is some discrepancy as to whether the word originates from the Latin verb "*perspicere*," which means "to scrutinize, perceive" and derives from "perspicuous," meaning "transparent, evident," or whether it derives from "*prospicere*" means "to see before one, look ahead." "Specio" in: *Etymological Dictionary of Latin*, edited by: Michiel de Vaan. Consulted online on 21/01/2018
<<http://dictionaries.brillonline.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/search#dictionary=latin&id=la1558>> First published online: Octobre 2010.

logos, so that self-representation becomes a vehicle of “self-transcendence.” In this way the concept of clarity becomes self-reflexive as well as highly evocative of Vico’s notion of metaphor as a structure of thought.

Finally, the concept of “clarity” concerns the problem of inchoation as it emerged in the debates of 1910, as Ivanov, Kuzmin and Mandelshtam responded to each other, as well as considered this concept independently. My research into each poet’s relationship to the term begins during the first decade of the twentieth century, when it first appears in Ivanov’s diaries and Kuzmin’s letters and early prose works. The year 1910 represents a focal point of my study because at this time the notion of clarity became contentious and inspired public polemical statements from the parties involved. I also examine Kuzmin’s and Mandelshtam’s interpretations of this idea throughout the 1920s, after the major catastrophic events of the First World War, the 1917 revolution and the Civil War. While at this time the poets’ interpretations of clarity reflect the tendencies of the age, engaging the ideas of Formalism and the idiom of Expressionism, they also recall the year 1910 and the aesthetic of the Silver Age as a time of the original discussion about this concept. Finally, I discuss Mandelshtam’s return to this notion at the height of the age of terror, in the late 1930s, when the idea of clarity becomes an emblem of human spirit—the “humanness” that Blok, in his preface to *Retribution* believed to have departed with the death of Tolstoy.

In sum, the term clarity as it appears in this dissertation, signifies several ideas, all of which come into play in the discussions on this subject. Clarity is a criterion of intelligibility: “cognitive grasp” that may be associated with a clear statement, or the clarity of a perceived object. Clarity is also a particular relationship between the subject and the object, where the “subject” may be the narrator and the object may be the poetic logos, or the poet’s self-

representation in the text. Clarity is also a specific relationship between the image and the word, and the signified and the signifier. Clarity represents the idea of origin as a *topos*: both as a cultural “locus” where meaning originates and a structure of thought that yields meaning. Finally, poetic clarity is a concept that resists specific, singular definition.

The four chapters of my dissertation focus on Ivanov, Kuzmin and Mandelshtam’s respective approaches to the concept of clarity. In the first chapter of my dissertation, “The Origins of Clarity and Clarity as the Idea of Origins,” I provide some historical context of the 1910 debates around the “crisis of Symbolism” and discuss the role of the concept of clarity as it emerges during this time. I also address contemporary critical assessment of this concept as it appeared in Kuzmin’s essay “On Beautiful Clarity.” I then trace the development of Ivanov’s and Kuzmin’s views on clarity, specifically as it pertains to the concept of inchoation in their aesthetic philosophies. I then address the contribution of these philosophies to the notion of clarity as a “creative form” as it emerged in the second phase of the debate in 1912. Finally, I discuss Osip Mandelshtam’s only contribution to the conversation on clarity that took place during the “crisis of Symbolism.”

In the second chapter, “The ‘Identity Poetics’ of Viacheslav Ivanov,” I argue that as the poet polemicizes against Kuzmin’s “Apollonian” clarity, he in effect proposes his own, alternate model of “clarity,” based on the idea of knowledge to which the subject is privy, and which the subject also represents. Addressing some of Ivanov’s early writings, his notes taken during his first trip to Rome, and some of his later, more well-known critical writings, I demonstrate that as he critiques the concept of clarity, this very concept is apparent in his method of the critique and embedded in his theurgist poetics.

In my third chapter, “The Clear Glass: Mikhail Kuzmin against St. Paul,” I demonstrate that Kuzmin first formulated his notion of clarity in polemic with St. Paul’s statement in his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, that clarity is possible only in the afterlife. I argue that Kuzmin’s later Classical concept of clarity is based in his polemic with St. Paul. For the poet, clarity is the liberating realization that the relationship to the fact is more important than the fact itself. Ivanov’s notion of origins or Paul’s notion of the afterlife lose their power to determine the subject’s “reality.” The same idea applies to the relationship between the image and the word and the poet and the word. I demonstrate how this principle works in tandem with Kuzmin’s technique of stylization in the novella *Wings*, “Histoire édifiante de mes commencements,” and the poem “The New Hull,” among several others texts.

In my fourth chapter, “Speech as ‘Epic Gesture’: Osip Mandelshtam’s Response to the Debate on Clarity,” I argue that Mandelshtam’s model of clarity goes beyond Ivanov’s theurgic paradigm and Kuzmin’s stylized clarté. Mandelshtam’s clarity pertains to his concept of memory as anamnesis. It is predicated upon the idea of loss of knowledge and its spontaneous reemergence as a collective, rather than an individual memory. I argue that Mandelshtam’s word is all-encompassing, able to recreate the other without appropriating it. This quality is the defining feature of his poetry as a history. In this chapter I look at Mandelshtam’s critical essays “Word and Culture” and “On the Nature of the Word,” his “Lethan Poems,” “The Noise of Time,” and “Poem about the Unknown Soldier,” among others.

Chapter 1

Clarity, “Clarism” and the Crisis of Symbolism

On March 17, 1910 the Symbolist poet, Viacheslav Ivanov, delivered a lecture entitled “The Precepts of Symbolism” [‘Zavety Simvolizma’] at the “Society for Free Aesthetics” [‘Obschestvo Svobodnoi Estetiki’] in Moscow, and nine days later read it again for the members of the “Society for the Adherents of the Artistic Word” [‘Obschestvo Revnitatei Khudozhestvennogo Slova’] in St. Petersburg.³⁸ In the lecture Ivanov addressed an essential problem of his time, which he phrases in the following manner: “the word ceased to be commensurate with inner experience” [“slovo perestalo byt’ ravnosil’nym sodержaniuu vnutrennego opyta”].³⁹ Ivanov was by no means the only poet to observe a shift in man’s relationship with language. Ivanov’s interpretation of this pan-global phenomenon, however, was unique. In his view language could not convey “inner experience,” because it could not adequately express its mystical content. Ivanov believed that it was up to the select few to make the heroic effort to articulate the ineffable. He proposed that Russian Symbolism, in existence since the 1890s, could respond to this challenge because, as the poetry of a “dual vision,” it recognized both the empirical and the mystical spheres of existence and was capable of addressing both realities. Ivanov believed Symbolism to be a “recollection” of the primordial time when priests were poets who spoke a privileged language that bridged the phenomenal and the noumenal. He urged the Symbolists to form a new priesthood in order to reconcile poetry and religion.

³⁸ O.A. Kuznetsova, “Diskussiiia o sostoianii russkogo simvolizma v ‘Obshchestve revnitatei khudozhestvennogo slova,’” *Russkaia literatura* 1 (1990), 200-207.

³⁹ V. Ivanov, “Zavety simvolizma,” *SS*, 2:589.

The months-long polemic that ensued after Ivanov's lecture constitutes the famous "crisis of Symbolism": a schism in the ranks of this movement without any hint of a synthesis.⁴⁰ The "older" Symbolists immediately rejected the idea of art as a religion. The "younger" Symbolists supported Ivanov, but without the conviction that accompanied their views in the preceding years. The argument transcended the ranks of the Symbolists, "old" or "young." In a letter, dated just a few days before Ivanov delivered of the lecture in St. Petersburg, Briusov mentioned that the St. Petersburg "Clarists" Mikhail Kuzmin, Sergei Makovsky, and other poets, artists and intellectuals associated with *Apollon*—in whose office Ivanov presided over the "Society for the Adherents of the Artistic Word" since autumn 1909—would likely also object to Ivanov's ideas.⁴¹ Two days later Briusov returned to the same subject in another letter: "The 'Clarists' defend clarity: clarity of thought, style, images... I am with the 'Clarists' with all of my soul."⁴² In the July-August issue of *Apollon*, and so a month after Ivanov published "The Precepts of Symbolism," Briusov retorted with "On 'Slavish Speech': in Defense of Poetry." In this essay he remarked that Romanticism and Symbolism could not be interpreted independently of their historical context. He insisted on the autonomy of art from religion, and on its inherent value as itself. In September, Ivanov's student, the young poet Nikolai Gumilev, recently back from his first voyage to Abyssinia and also present at Ivanov's lecture in St. Petersburg, wrote to Briusov

⁴⁰ Kuznetsova lists some of the essays that responded to Ivanov. These titles include: V. Briusov's "On 'Slavish Speech': In Defense of Poetry" ["O rechi rabskoi: v zashchitu poezii"] in *Apollon* 9 (1910); D. Merezhkovskii's "Travesty and Tragedy" ["Balagan i tragediia"] in *Russkoe Slovo* 14 (1910); A. Belyi, "A Wreath or a Crown" ["Venok ili venets"] in *Apollon* 11 (1910); S. Adrianov "Critical Notes" ["Kriticheskie nabroski"] in *Vestnik Evropy* (October 1910), etc. Kuznetsova, "Diskussii o sostoianii russkogo simvolizma," 200. Nikolai Gumilev's "The Life of a Poem" ["Zhizn' stikha"] in *Apollon* 7 (1910) surely also belongs in this list.

⁴¹ Kuznetsova, "Diskussii o sostoianii russkogo simvolizma," 201.

⁴² Nikolai Bogomolov and John Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin: iskusstvo, zhizn', epokha* (St. Petersburg: Vita Nova, 2007), 251.

that he has been “won over” by his essay, especially by its theoretical component.⁴³ This letter adumbrated Gumilev’s future position toward Ivanov. His definitive split from Ivanov as his mentor took place the following year, on April 13, 1911, after Ivanov’s apparently inappropriately aggressive, nearly rude critique of his poem “Prodigal Son.”⁴⁴ As a result, he left Ivanov’s salon in the company of several other poets, including Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelshtam and soon initiated his own literary movement, Acmeism.

Mandelshtam, who met Ivanov in 1908, also considered him his mentor. During the polemic around the crisis of Symbolism he was studying in Germany, where he followed the unfolding debates “with great interest.”⁴⁵ His letters to Ivanov from abroad convey genuine respect toward him as a teacher and poet.⁴⁶ But upon Mandelshtam’s return to St. Petersburg in 1911, he joined the “Poets’ Guild” [“Tsekh Poetov”], established by Gumilev and Sergei Gorodetsky as an alternative to Ivanov’s “Akademiia Stikha” in the fall of that year, and then became a core participant of Acmeism, which evolved from the Guild by the end of 1911.⁴⁷ In spite of its relatively brief existence as an actual movement, Acmeism would challenge and, at least in the eyes of some, “overcome” Symbolism.⁴⁸

Although Ivanov’s “The Precepts of Symbolism” did not single-handedly precipitate the schism in the ranks of the Symbolists and cause the eventual creation of a new school of poetry

⁴³ Ibid., 251.

⁴⁴ Kuznetsova, “Diskussiiia o sostoianii russkogo simvolizma,” 203.

⁴⁵ Gregory Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors: Osip Mandelstam and his Mythologies of Self-Presentation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 29.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 27-29.

⁴⁷ Justin Doherty, *The Acmeist Movement in Russian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 67-73. Acmeism originated on February 18, 1912, at a meeting of the Poets’ Guild, but the “Guild” and the new poetic movement were not identical. Doherty writes: “Of over a dozen regular members of ‘Tsekh Poetov’, only Akhmatova, Mandel’shtam, Narbut, and Zenkevich decided to support the program” (72).

⁴⁸ Victor Zhirmunskii, “Preodolevshie simvolizm,” *Antologiiia akmeizma* Ed. T.A. Bek. (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1997), 211-241.

that succeeded his own, it brought preexisting differences in perspectives to the fore. In this context, Briusov's enthusiasm for the "Clarists" is significant. It indicates that he believed they shared his own aesthetic position of "art for art's sake." It also suggests that he recognized the references to Kuzmin's "On Beautiful Clarity" in Ivanov's "Precepts." Unlike the Symbolists, and later the Acmeists and the Futurists, the "Clarists" never formed a movement, and there are few references to them in the documents dating to this period. *Apollon's* editor, Makovsky was certainly one of the most prominent "Clarists." Kuzmin and his epigones, such as Sergei Auslender, the young writer Johannes von Guenther, and some veterans of Sergei Diaghilev's *World of Art* magazine, such as Alexandre Benois, and Mstislav Dobuzhinski were all associated with "Clarism" as a set of aesthetic principles. These were likely discussed in conversations not only in the office of *Apollon*, but in Ivanov's salon at his famous Tower.

The essay that articulates the "Clarist" position and in an unassuming and understated manner insinuates itself into the center of the polemic appears to address formal issues pertaining specifically to style. Although deliberately "secular" in tone, "On Beautiful Clarity" does begin with a retelling of the Biblical origin myth. Kuzmin's thesis is that differentiation is in the nature of creation, and that this is evident in the creation myth, as well as given in individual experience, since the self emerges in relation to the objective world. Writing "clearly," he suggests, imitates these two instances of origination.⁴⁹ This concept is the foundation of Kuzmin's critique of those who in his opinion fail as prose writers. With a dose of irony directed at the didactic tone of his own writing, the author implores them to observe the basic rules of logic, "natural" to the human mind, and demands that the form of a work cohere with its content. He openly defines his position as "Apollonian," and situates the origin of this position in the

⁴⁹ M. Kuzmin, "O prekrasnoi iasnosti," *Proza i esseistika v trekh tomakh*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Agraf, 1999-2000), 3:5-10. Hereafter referred to as *PE*.

“Romanic” countries, reiterating that it is based in “differentiation, organization, precision and harmony” [“apollonicheskii vzgliad na iskusstvo: razdeliaiushchii, formiruiushchii, tochnyi i stroinyi ”]. Kuzmin’s “clarity” appears to derive from the “French” view that language should reflect the order of the universe, and that there is a rational connection between grammar, reason and the world at large.⁵⁰ There is, however, an important difference between the Cartesian rationalism of Port Royal grammarians and Kuzmin’s point. He insists that “experiential” rather than “learned” grammar of one’s native tongue be respected. And although he obviously describes a kind of Classicism, many of the names he lists in support of his idea are not Classical in the traditional sense. For example, in addition to “Latin” authors from Apuleius to Anatole France, he lists the quintessentially Romantic E.T.A. Hoffman and Edgar Allan Poe as writers of “crystalline” prose.

“On Beautiful Clarity” had a lasting effect on some of Ivanov’s opponents. Kuzmin’s poetics greatly influenced some of the Acmeists, and affected Acmeist theory as a whole.⁵¹ In the wake of the “crisis of Symbolism” their critical writing reflected the basic tenets of his “Clarism.” Gumilev’s “Symbolist Heritage and Acmeism”(1912) and Sergei Gorodetsky’s “On Some Tendencies in Contemporary Russian Poetry” (1913), for example, emphasize “Classical” notions of line, boundary and crystallization over the murkiness and vagueness of Symbolist

⁵⁰Sylvie Romanowski, “Descartes: From Science to Discourse.” *Yale French Studies* 49 (1973): 96-109.

⁵¹ In addition to the works already mentioned, Timenchik, Toporov and Tsiviian’s “Akhmatova and Kuzmin” is an in-depth examination of the relationship between the older poet and the Acmeists. R.D. Timenchik, V.N. Toporov, T.V. Tsiviian, “Akhmatova i Kuzmin.” *Russian Literature* 1-3 (1978): 213-305.

poetics.⁵² Viktor Zhirmunsky's "Those Who Have Overcome Symbolism" (1916) designates Kuzmin as the forefather of Acmeist poetics. Zhirmunsky views Acmeism as Neoclassical and implies that Kuzmin's "clarity" was an attribute of the style that is "emotionally poor, rationally self-possessed, but well-drawn and rich in visual impressions, lines, colors and forms."⁵³ The Acmeist position with respect to "clarté" did not differ significantly from Ivanov's. Consistent with only some of Kuzmin's statements in "On Beautiful Clarity," the younger poets defined it as balance of form and content, clarity of contours, transparency of meaning, etc. As late as 1921 Mandelshtam refers to the "clarism" of Tolstoy's early prose as "transparency of form."⁵⁴

Yet as the Acmeists adopted these principles into their own anti-Symbolist poetics, they also viewed this "classical" clarity as potentially limiting. In Gumilev's critical essays on Kuzmin—"On Kuzmin's Prose" in the fifth issue of *Apollon* in 1910 and "Alexander Blok and Mikhail Kuzmin" in the eighth issue of the magazine in 1912—the author discusses the poet as one of the foremost in Russian poetry and prose of the period, yet also likens Kuzmin's style to a glass pane that separates the reader from the text, and hints at a certain artifice of his aesthetic. Similar criticism figures in Mandelshtam's responses to Kuzmin, discussed in the third chapter of this study. The concept of "clarté" as a barrier echoes Ivanov's view that some truth, concealed behind the veneer of the obvious, is waiting to be awakened by the poet who can speak its obscure idiom. The Acmeists, therefore, viewed "Clarism" as a kind of Apollonian "toolbox" that should be applied to their agenda to create a post-Symbolist poetics that would get at this "truth" in its own manner.

⁵² Sergei Gorodetskii, "On Some Tendencies in Contemporary Russian Poetry," *Antologiiia akmeizma*, 202.

⁵³ Victor Zhirmunskii. "Preodolevshie simvolizm," *Antologiiia akmeizma*, 211-241.

⁵⁴ Mandel'shtam, "O prirode slova," *PSS*, 2:64-81.

There is considerable disagreement among contemporary critics about the importance of “On Beautiful Clarity” to the poet himself as well as to his contemporaries. Bogomolov and Malmstad argue that its contribution to the events surrounding the “crisis of Symbolism” is exaggerated.⁵⁵ They point out that the essay was written while Kuzmin was on excellent terms with Ivanov, and in fact resided at the Tower between 1909 and 1912. In his diaries Ivanov even claims that he was the one to baptize Kuzmin’s views as “Clarist.” On August 7, 1909 he writes: “I made up for Renouveau [Kuzmin’s nickname at the Tower] a project for a group I baptized as the ‘clarists’ (after ‘purists’) from ‘clarté’.”⁵⁶ The scholars suggest that although Kuzmin may not have subscribed to Viacheslav Ivanov’s theories, his essay was hardly pivotal in the Symbolist polemic. They are particularly against the view that “On Beautiful Clarity” is a pre-Acmeist manifesto. Indeed, Kuzmin’s “Clarism” emerges two years before Acmeism, a movement that he never quite acknowledged and appeared not to respect. Certainly, Kuzmin was not writing with Gumilev in mind. Bogomolov and Malmstad mention that Kuzmin never used the term “Clarism” after the polemic, nor did he ever republish the essay, and conclude that he did not attribute it too much importance.⁵⁷ As they examine “On Beautiful Clarity” in the historical context of the “crisis of Symbolism,” they conclude that this context lent more historical weight to the text in the eyes of the subsequent generations than the author himself ever assigned to it.⁵⁸

The critics refer to a number of remarks on “clarity” and “Clarism” that emerged in the wake of Kuzmin’s essay. First among them were the aforementioned “Precepts of Symbolism” by Ivanov. A few weeks later Blok continued the discussion with his ‘On the Present Status of

⁵⁵ Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 246-252.

⁵⁶ Ivanov, *SS* 2:784-785.

⁵⁷ Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 251.

⁵⁸ Bogomolov and Malmstad, 249.

Russian Symbolism' where he used the word "clarity" with a specifically Symbolist twist: to see "clearly" can only mean to see past phenomenal reality.⁵⁹ Then, there were the aforementioned "clarist" declarations in "Symbolist Heritage and Acmeism" by Gumilev, "On Some Tendencies in Contemporary Russian Poetry" by Gorodetsky and "Those Who Have Overcome Symbolism" by Zhirmunsky. On the other side of the spectrum, in the *Memoirs of Blok* (1920-1921) Andrei Bely recalls "beautiful clarity" with outright indignation.⁶⁰ None of these texts treat the concept as anything more than the idea of transparency of meaning, concrete imagery, and precise and nuanced expression of ideas, emotions and impressions. This "clarity" followed the poet all the way to his grave. Bogomolov and Malmstad quote one I. M. Basalaev, who describes a speech at Kuzmin's funeral: "He [Vissarion Sayanov] spoke of the *clarté* in Kuzmin's poetry, of the lofty sensibility of the poet, of the clarity and classicism in his poems."⁶¹

Bogomolov and Malmstad's unwillingness to consider "On Beautiful Clarity" an important statement of the poet's aesthetic position may itself be the result of abundant but superficial response of his contemporaries. Indeed, if Kuzmin never reprinted the essay, it could have been because he was either dissatisfied with the response it garnered, or because he felt it was too embroiled in the kind of debates that he preferred to avoid. While "On Beautiful Clarity"

⁵⁹ Aleksandr Blok, "On the Present Status of Russian Symbolism," in Ronald E. Peterson (ed.), *The Russian Symbolists: An Anthology of Critical and Theoretical Writings* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), 157.

⁶⁰ Andrei Belyi, *Vospominaniia o Bloke* (Moscow: Iz-vo Respublika, 1995) 40, 41, and especially 105. Bely is unique in drawing a parallel between "beautiful clarity" and the apocalyptic realism of the Russian 1880s. He also makes a fascinating distinction between the meaning of the mind—rationality, or "rassudok"—and the meaning of the heart—a different kind of clarity. Poignantly, the latter is explicitly not Kuzmin's "beautiful" clarity, and is based on an image, that "blossoms" as meaning of its own accord and independently of the mind's conceptualizations. (105)

⁶¹ Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 502.

was not intended as a manifesto—the tone and posture of this genre would have been viscerally unacceptable to the poet—it is a mistake to downplay its significance.

John Barnstead, conversely, argues that Kuzmin's essay is highly polemical, that it places itself squarely in the middle of the debates around the "crisis of Symbolism," and engages Ivanov's ideas. In his study "Mikhail Kuzmin's 'On Beautiful Clarity' and Viacheslav Ivanov: A Reconsideration" Barnstead outlines major points of contention between Ivanov and Kuzmin, and singles out specific concepts and images introduced by the former but reclaimed and reinterpreted by the latter.⁶² He observes that the poets resort to some of the same binary oppositions: order and chaos, land versus sea, Apollo versus Dionysus, and form and dissolution. The nature of the argument, he suggests, concerns a preference for one or the other aspect of the binary. Avril Pyman also mentions Kuzmin's essay as an open and, in her opinion, shortsighted criticism of the "acrobatic syntax" of the prose of Bely and Remizov. Pyman interprets this essay as a declaration of the author's alliance with Briusov against the "younger" Symbolists. She also believes that it reiterates ideas that were already circulating in print, discussed on Ivanov's Tower, and at his "Academy" in the office of *Apollon*.⁶³

It is, indeed, highly probable that "On Beautiful Clarity" engages specific concepts articulated by Ivanov in his essays, and discussed in the lively debates in the artistic circles that met in his salon and at *Apollon*. Yet the essay is not limited to a critique of a few specific concepts, as Barnstead's analysis might suggest, nor is it merely a summary of ideas already in

⁶² John A. Barnstead, "Mikhail Kuzmin's 'On Beautiful Clarity' and Viacheslav Ivanov: A Reconsideration." *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 24.1 (1982): 1-10. Barnstead demonstrates that Kuzmin's essay responds to Ivanov's "Predchuvstviia i predvestiia," "Novaia organicheskaia epokha i teatr budushchego," "O veselom remesle i umnom veselii" "Borozdy i mezhi: o probleme teatra," and "Ty esi." Ivanov's "Manera, litso i stil" and his much later "Zavety simvolisma" in turn respond to Kuzmin's ideas.

⁶³ Pyman, *History of Russian Symbolism*, 308-309.

circulation during this period. Rather, it is one of several texts in which the author offers an insight into his very unique philosophy of writing.

Addressing clarity proper, Kuzmin insists that it is an attribute of literary style. He elaborates that “clarity” is the effect of care with which the author handles language as an object much greater than his individual self. It emerges from the respect toward the “natural” laws of a given idiom. Kuzmin specifies that by “logic” he means the individual character of a language and not an imposed structure.⁶⁴ But he also describes style as the unique imprint of the author’s persona on language as the medium. Finally, he addresses stylization as an expression of such keen interest in the style of another that the author reproduces it as exactly as possible in his own work. The aesthetic of “On Beautiful Clarity” is based in ethics: it is an invitation to pay attention to another. Among Kuzmin’s contemporaries only Gumilev seems to have observed this quality of the poet’s writing. In his article “On Kuzmin’s Prose” he writes that he, like Pushkin, pays careful attention to language as an object far greater than the individual, and lauds the “chastity” of such an approach. Kuzmin’s poetic “chastity” is also his “clarity” as the measure of distance between the self and an object.⁶⁵

Unlike Kuzmin, who writes on style, Ivanov approaches “clarity” as a problem of being. Ironically, as he insists that clarity disguises a truer reality, he echoes the progenitor of French “clarté.” Like Descartes, Ivanov seeks an immutable, infallible language of pure insight and certainty.⁶⁶ Conversely, while Kuzmin’s “On Beautiful Clarity” is filled with allusions to “clarté”—Molière, Buffon and Anatole France appear in it alongside others—the author addresses the problem of the word. Yet Kuzmin’s is a poetic philosophy as well, and in this

⁶⁴Kuzmin, “O prekrasnoi iasnosti,” *PE* 3:6.

⁶⁵ Nikolai Gumilev, “O proze Kuzmina.” *Apollon* 5 (1910), 56.

⁶⁶ Romanowski, “Descartes: From Science to Discourse,” 100.

sense Ivanov is right: his “clarity” does indeed dissemble. The pseudo-transparent quality of Kuzmin’s writing, likened by his contemporaries to a glass barrier, is an aspect of a metaphysics of superficiality, wherein in addition to serving as a stylistic quality and an ethical imperative, clarity plays the role of an aesthetic object—an “image”— in its own right.

The argument about clarity evokes several important questions. As Ivanov rejects the principle of “French” intelligibility as the idea of correspondence between the sign and the referent, he advances the notion of an obscure, inarticulate poetics that evokes the invisible essence of being. Since such a poetics communicates like any other, its “obscure” clarity requires its own definition. It is also important to address the problem of Kuzmin’s “beautiful clarity” as dissembling, and uncover what, if anything, it conceals. Furthermore, it is imperative to consider the implications of clarity as the concept of ethical distance. Ivanov’s poetics of being and Kuzmin’s poetical metaphysics of superficiality require a careful investigation. Before answering these questions, however, these poets’ aesthetic and philosophical backgrounds must to be addressed in order to establish the full significance of the term “clarity” to the parties involved. The third subject of this dissertation, Mandelshtam, forges his own model of clarity based on the interplay of their distinct approaches.

Romanticism and Ivanov’s Dionysian Theory

The most obvious and most immediate context of Ivanov’s take on clarity is Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872). In this famous text Nietzsche advances his theory on the role of the Dionysian and Apollonian forces in classical tragedy. Apollo is the deity of clarity, distinctness, image and masculine individualism. He presides over the illusionistic dream world. Dionysus is the god of the life force, religious ecstasy, music and

feminine unity of all. Nietzsche mentions “Apolline definiteness and clarity,” and “the Apolline appearances in which Dionysus objectifies himself.”⁶⁷ Blending philology and philosophy, he associates the “Apolline” with the epic: “Homeric ‘naïvité’ can be understood only as the complete victory of Apolline illusion,” while tragedy is the sphere of Dionysus.⁶⁸

For Ivanov—as well as Bely—the encounter with Nietzsche’s philosophy in 1891 and 1899 respectively, was a momentous event.⁶⁹ In Russia the influence of the German philosopher was so ubiquitous in the last years of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century, that it became a posture.⁷⁰ The World of Art writers and artists, for example, were known for their Nietzschean “individualism,” their subjectivist aesthetic grounded in the belief that art is the highest metaphysical pursuit.⁷¹ Prominent figures like Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Lev Shestov and Vasily Rosanov were only some of the “Nietzsche’s orphans” of the age.⁷² Bely and Ivanov were no exception. But while Ivanov’s entire career as a theorist, philosopher and poet could be viewed as a counterargument specifically to the ideas in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the philosopher’s concept of the “Apollonian” came to represent the “Classical” and “French” clarity that he set

⁶⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 46. Nietzsche is not the first to reference “Apollonian clarity” of the Greeks. In the modern age, Johann Winckelmann first articulated this idea. In *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755) he describes Greek antiquity as aspiring toward clarity, and famously supports his argument with a reference to the sculptural composition of the death of Laokoön.

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 25.

⁶⁹ Pyman, *History of Russian Symbolism*, 220-224.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 108-109.

⁷¹ E. V. Ermilova, *Teoriia i obraznyi mir russkogo simvolizma* (Moscow: Nauka, 1989) 123.

⁷² “Nietzsche’s orphans” is the subject and title of a recently published study of Russian classical music in the pre-revolutionary period. Scriabin, whom I mention in my dissertation because of the essay his close friend Ivanov dedicated to him, and because of Mandelshtam’s response to this essay, is a major subject in this book, and one of the most prominent “orphans.” Rebecca Mitchell, *Nietzsche’s Orphans: Music, Metaphysics, and the Twilight of the Russian Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

out to dismantle. Here, it is necessary to say a few words about Ivanov's life prior to the "crisis of Symbolism."

Between 1886 and 1905 Ivanov lives abroad. A gifted twenty-year-old scholar of classical history, he moves to Berlin to study with the eminent historian Theodor Mommsen. Once there, he soon changes his focus from history to classical philology. As he works on a dissertation (in Latin) about Roman law, he is also attracted by the mysticism and religious philosophy of his day. At this time he reads Vladimir Solovyov, whose theurgic "Sophiology" and messianic philosophy of art proved to be a profound and lasting influence on him.⁷³ When in 1891 he encounters Nietzsche's philosophy, it is through the prism of his classical studies and religious thought. In his autobiography, Ivanov writes that reading Nietzsche jolted him awake to his life's purpose: to "overcome" the philosopher specifically in the sphere of religious thought.⁷⁴

Henceforth, Ivanov becomes exceedingly interested in the Dionysian cults. Eventually, he seeks to prove that the ancient deity is in reality an eternal spiritual force and a prefiguration of Christ, and so inscribe the divine within the framework of respectable classical study.⁷⁵ Ivanov spends years between Rome, Athens, London, Paris, and Geneva. He divorces, remarries, maintains ties with Russia, but lives the life of a European scholar, and is versed in French, German, Italian, ancient Greek and Latin. In 1903 he visits Moscow to present the results of his

⁷³ Solovyov's theurgism believes the purpose of art is to transform humankind and society toward a utopian future. Michael Wachtel points out that for the philosopher it was a "goal to be realized by future generations," while the Symbolists made it their program. Michael Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Vyacheslav Ivanov* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 144-145.

⁷⁴ Ivanov, "Autobiographical Letter to S. A. Vengerov," SS 2:19-21.

⁷⁵ Philip Westbrook, *Dionis i dionisiiskaia tragediia. Viacheslav Ivanov: filologicheskie i filosofskie idei o dionisiistve* [*Dionysus and Dionysian Tragedy. Viacheslav Ivanov: Philological and Philosophical Ideas on Dionysianism*] (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 2009), 18-25. The subsequent discussion of Nietzsche's philosophy in Ivanov's oeuvre is informed by Westbrook's excellent study.

research in a series of lectures entitled “The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God,” published in 1904. In 1905, almost twenty years after his departure, he finally returns to the motherland, settles in St. Petersburg and for a lengthy period of time opens the doors of his Tower to the entire intellectual and creative milieu of the city. Ivanov does not stay in Russia forever, however. He flees the Revolution for Baku, where he defends his second dissertation in 1921, and eventually returns to his beloved Rome. His second dissertation—a revised and expanded version of his earlier research—appears in print in 1923 as *Dionysus and Early Dionysianism*.⁷⁶ Ivanov continues to work on this text for the rest of his life.

Unlike Nietzsche, Ivanov interprets classical tragedy as a sacred action. For Nietzsche it is imperative to examine it as an aesthetic, rather than religious or moral phenomenon, and to interpret both the Dionysian and Apollonian states as expressions of nature’s creative powers. Dionysian ecstasy exposes the illusory nature of individuation, and allows to experience life, everlasting only as a totality, in spite of the inevitable destruction of the individual. Apollo represents the dream world of the illusory individual self. This state is also a conduit to the experience of the totality and wholeness of being, albeit through form, image and reflection. It is protective and salvific for the mind that cannot sustain the concept of its own destruction. Ivanov disagrees with a central tenet of Nietzsche’s philosophy: its irreverent, anti-religious stance. For him, Dionysian ecstasy is an insight into the sacred principle of existence and an awakening of the divine principle within the self. It is the means to surpass the Apollonian illusion. He even goes so far as to interpret Nietzsche’s final illness as the result of underestimating the nature of

⁷⁶ Michael Wachtel, “Nauchnyi proekt: v poiskakh podlinnogo ‘Dionisa’ (o neosushchestvl’ennoi nemetskoï knige Viach. Ivanova)” in G. M. Bongard-Levin (ed.), *Vestnik istorii, literatury, iskusstva* 5 (Moscow, 2008), 551-560.

the forces he himself discovered: an irreverence toward “Dionysus” and preference for “Apollo.”⁷⁷

Ivanov’s writing—both scholarly and literary—was profoundly influenced not only by Solovyov and Nietzsche, but also by German Romanticism. Philip Westbrook’s examination of Ivanov’s scholarship provides a thorough analysis of its Romantic foundations in a line of thinkers from Johann Herder to Georg Creuzer, Karl Otfried Müller, Friedrich Welcker, and others.⁷⁸ Romantic authors such as Novalis and Tyutchev are a ubiquitous presence in his essays and poetry. Westbrook observes, that unlike Nietzsche, Ivanov wants to revive the Romantic quest for a synthetic, mystical worldview.⁷⁹

Curiously, while Ivanov never conceals his indebtedness to Nietzsche and Solovyov, he appears to ignore the prominent Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schelling. Yet, according to Westbrook, Ivanov’s Dionysian concept is very similar to Schelling’s. Both view “Dionysus” as a dialectic of the deity’s descent into the plurality of identities, death or passage through the self, and ascent, synthesis or return. Unlike Nietzsche, both Schelling and Ivanov do not perceive Socratic philosophy as destroying Dionysian religions, and both believe Christianity to be the new form of these religions. However, unlike Schelling, Ivanov understands the relationship between antiquity and Christianity as a continuity rather than an evolution.⁸⁰

Westbrook’s analysis focuses only on the texts where Schelling discusses Dionysus, but his observation could be applied more broadly to Schelling’s “identity philosophy,” as it is presented in his *System of the Whole of Philosophy and the Philosophy of Nature in Particular* (1804). Identity philosophy proposes that separation between the subject and the object is

⁷⁷ Westbrook, *Dionysus and Dionysian Tragedy*, 206-212.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 31-33.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 215-216.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 229-231, 252.

illusory. Instead, Schelling implies a metonymic relationship between them: being is the “subject” while the plurality of individual beings is its many predicates.⁸¹ This principle reverberates in Ivanov’s oeuvre: the relationship between Dionysus and Apollo is essentially its reiteration. The Apollonian “monad” is the “predicate” of the Dionysian being. The ecstatic “birth” of Dionysus within the individual actuates this relationship.

Ivanov’s relationship with Romanticism is complex. In such programmatic essays as “Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism” (1908) he critiques “idealism,” and advances the notion of the symbol as mimetically “corresponding” to “the real”—which as Westbrook points out, is for him analogous with the realm of Platonic Ideas. He insists on realism as the return to a coherent, concrete world that is not only knowable through “ecstasy” and “insight,” but is knowable absolutely, “objectively.” Symbolist realism, he states, is “the principle of fidelity to things as they are phenomenally and in their essence” [“printsip vernosti veshchiam , kakovy oni sut’ v iavlenii i v sushchestve svoem”].⁸² This aspect of his thought leads Westbrook to propose that as Ivanov seeks to “revise” Romanticism, and resurrect pre-Kantian metaphysics.⁸³ But Ivanov’s insistence on knowing things “in their essence,” as the noumenon rather than the phenomenon, hinges on his understanding of Solovyov’s theurgism, Nietzsche’s veneration of the artist, and the poet’s personal ambitions, and creates a contradiction between theory and praxis.⁸⁴ According to ‘Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism,’ Symbolist Realism is the

⁸¹ In my discussions of metonymy and metaphor I follow Roman Jakobson’s famous juxtaposition between contiguity and substitution in “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances” in *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1987), 95-114.

⁸² Ivanov, *SS* 2:539-541.

⁸³ Westbrook, *Dionysus and Dionysian Tragedy*, 273.

⁸⁴ Wachtel points out that Solov’ev understood theurgy as transformation of the world through art. Ivanov changes this idea to mean specifically the artist’s ability to have insight into the noumenal. Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism*, 145.

idea of the symbol's correspondence to the "realiora" as the "most real" aspect of a thing. A symbol is therefore mimetic or metaphoric. But his "theurgic insight" leads him to insist also on a vision of its metonymic connection to the invisible reality. For example, as he writes about grain and bread as sacramental, because "ears of wheat recall the wedding of Demeter and Dionysus," instead of using the word "sacrament"—in Russian, "prichastie," from "chast'" or "part"—he emphasizes those who take part in it, and utilizes the participle "prichashchais'" or "taking part in the sacrament," and the nouns "prichastnik" and "prichastnitsa" – the male or female participants in this ritual. Ivanov's use of this notion conveys two ideas at once: the metonymic character of his concept of symbol, and the esoteric, select nature of Symbolist Realism. The so-called "objective" reality hinges entirely on the privileged subjectivity of the theurgist, destroying any chance for the reader to perceive herself in the narrative as one of the "res." Ivanov's pre-Kantian metaphysics has the potential to be a purely solipsist one, while his critique of Romanticism is quintessentially Romantic. Ironically, in the same essay, "Two Elements of Contemporary Symbolism," Ivanov references Pushkin as the true "classic" because his subjectivity prevails over the mystery of the object, and again offers Tyutchev as an example of the opposite approach.⁸⁵

In the "Precepts of Symbolism" Ivanov expressed a hopeful vision for the "Dionysian" processes in the poetry of his time. Quoting not only from Tyutchev and Novalis, but also Goethe, he attempts to adumbrate the "real" Classicism, based on scholarly research into the Dionysian cults. This system assigned the god of clarity a specific place. Apollo is the deity of illusory individual form, structure, organization, agreement, subordination, and ascent—from the multiplicity of forms, to a vision of the supreme Ideal Form. He is also a necessary limit to the

⁸⁵ Ivanov, *SS* 2:557.

Dionysian impulse of self-sacrificing descent and potentially infinite outpouring into being.⁸⁶ Clarity is both his attribute and his “action” or predicate. According to Ivanov, it creates the illusion of separation. He quotes from Tyutchev’s poem “Spring,” where in the last stanza the poet urges to put aside the subterfuge of personhood, and dive into the ocean of life as a totality. Poignantly, he chooses the verse where Tyutchev uses the words “bud’ prichasten”— “be a part of,” “take part in,” or “commune with.” Ivanov then negatively contrasts this vision with the “duplicitous” clarity, that he believes stems from the Enlightenment views on the word’s adequacy to reason, and its communicability. He also associates “the views of the eighteenth century” with Pushkin’s aesthetic, thus juxtaposing the Russian Classic with the Russian Romantic.⁸⁷ The word that believes itself to be adequate to reason does not function like the “symbol” in Ivanov’s understanding. It is not a sacrament of unity, but an instrument of division.

Kuzmin’s Classical “Clarism”

Kuzmin’s “Clarism” was informed by the aesthetic of the World of Art, an affiliation of creative, industrious and charismatic “decadents” that provided the atmosphere and the stimulus that had a deep and lasting effect on Kuzmin.⁸⁸ The World of Art aesthetic entailed “retrospectivism”: a keen interest and revival of styles from a variety of historical periods; playfulness, and stylization as a kind of game; and an emphasis not only fine art, but craft as well. This is particularly important for Kuzmin, whose “On Beautiful Clarity” advocates a craftsman’s attitude toward writing. The World of Art consisted mostly of visual artists, art

⁸⁶ Gasan Guseinov, “Proektsii ‘dionisiistva’ v biografii Viacheslava Ivanova.” *Simvol* 65 (Paris, 2015), 430-470, 431.

⁸⁷ Ivanov, *SS* 2:593.

⁸⁸ Gennadii Shmakov, “Blok i Kuzmin.” *Blokovskii sbornik II* (Tartu: Tartuskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1972), 341-364, 349.

critics, and connoisseurs, the importance of image was for them uncontested.⁸⁹ Their playfulness, taste for irony, and their treatment of art and craft as valuable in itself, without recourse to an external agenda, self-consciously recalled “Arzamas,” the nineteenth-century group of Russian poets that yielded the “school of harmonious precision.”⁹⁰ Its most famous participant, Pushkin became the subject of such keen interest and inspiration for the World of Art that in 1899 they dedicated the entire 13-14th issue of their eponymous magazine to the poet, effectively inaugurating the revival of the “Pushkinian” aesthetic.⁹¹ Kuzmin’s “On Beautiful Clarity” reiterates the principles of clarity, attention to specific detail, vitality and irony that defined the “school of harmonious precision,” esteemed among his friends at the World of Art.

The kind of “Pushkinian” Classicism that interested this group of artists as well as Kuzmin had little to do with Cartesian rationalism. As visual artists, architects, draftsmen, they were attracted first and foremost by the aesthetic of Pushkin’s era, alongside a plethora of other Classical and Neoclassical styles, such as that of the Versailles, Empire, Petrine Baroque, but also Japanese prints, Russian folk art and craft, etc. Research into a variety of aesthetic systems led to the formation of a stylized Neoclassicism that referenced its own lightheartedness, fragility, and evanescence. Pushkin represented a paradigm of the style toward which they aspired, not only for his wit, clarity, and economy of means, but also for his unique ability to reconcile ostensibly incompatible elements, registers and modalities of speech, to synthesize at will Classical and Romantic traditions in Europe and in Russia. The World of Art, defined by its

⁸⁹ Magdalena Medarić, “Modern kak predavangardnyi stil’.” *Russian Literature* XXXVI (1994): 57-80, 63- 76.

⁹⁰ Gasparov, *Poeticheskii iazyk Pushkina*, 50-73.

⁹¹ Pyman, *History of Russian Symbolism*, 109.

eclecticism, valued the kind of Classicism that “does not exclude contradictions present in reality” but removes “the drama of incompatibility.”⁹²

In Kuzmin’s writing, “Pushkinian” clarity emerges as several specific ideas. It represents the notion of language as a living organism that captures and contains the fleeting historical moment.⁹³ Such clarity is not abstract or idealist, quite to the contrary. When Pushkin availed himself of Boileau-Despréaux’s principle of clarity articulated in the “Art Poétique,” he viewed it through the lens of a new understanding of language as a complex, evolving “organism.”⁹⁴ In wake of the Romantic reaction against Classicism and situated outside both traditions narrowly defined, he applied Boileau’s “clarté” to the needs of the era he inhabited.⁹⁵ Pushkin’s “clarity” signifies perspicuity with respect to language as a concrete historical and social reality, an insight into its “character” and trajectory of historical development. To these aspects of “Pushkinian” clarity as the vitality of a language, Kuzmin adds a mystical dimension: a uniquely “Kuzminian” idea of writing as an alchemy.

Both Pushkin and Boileau believed that to be more “lifelike” poetry had to become more like prose: in other words, it should embrace be rich in thoughts and “natural,” rather than

⁹² Podgaetskaia, *Izbrannye stat'i*, 115.

⁹³ Long after the “crisis of Symbolism” Kuzmin addresses this concept in the poem “Pushkin” (1921), where he describes the poet as alive to a greater degree than anyone else. The poem begins: “On zhiv! U vsekh dusha netlenna,/ No on osobeeno zhivet!” M. A. Kuzmin, “Pushkin,” *Sobranie stikhotvorenii*, 3 vols. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1978), 2:221-222. Hereafter referred to as SS.

⁹⁴ Pushkin’s lasting respect for Boileau and his approach to Boileau’s instruction is the subject of Boris Tomashevsky’s “Pushkin and Bualo.” B. Tomashevsky, “Pushkin i Bualo.” *Pushkin v mirovoi literature* (Leningrad: GIZ, 1926), 13-63.

⁹⁵ But even in Boileau’s time his poem may have had a very different meaning than the one we ascribe it today. E.N. Kupriianova’s “On the Question of Classicism” argues convincingly that the roots of French Neoclassicism are in the philosophy of Francis Bacon rather than Cartesian Rationalism. She demonstrates that Reason as Boileau understood it was inseparable from sense and experience. She proffers also that his “L’Art Poétique” was intended as an instructional manual rather than a dogmatic system. E. N. Kupriianova, “K voprosy o klassitsizme.” *XVIII Vek: stat'i i materialy* 4 (1959): 5-44.

ornate.⁹⁶ Kuzmin likewise rejects the Symbolist idea of an elevated, unchanging, priestly idiom. He subtly reintroduces this concept in the title of his essay: “On Beautiful Clarity: Notes on Prose.” While he focuses on prose writers, the stylistic question of writing ornately but ineffectively (Bely, Remizov) versus clearly (Moliere, Pushkin, Poe, Hoffman) echoes Pushkin’s poetics and easily applies to his own.

Finally, the question of “Pushkinian” clarity in Kuzmin’s work pertains to the notion of origin. Any Russian child knows that Pushkin is the “father” of Russian literature. But when Prosper Mérimée observed that, “Pushkin’s poetry blossoms as if of its own volition from the harshest prose,” he alluded to the idea that in its (deceptive) spontaneity and immediacy, Pushkin’s poetics is original not once, but in perpetuity.⁹⁷ His poetry appears every time as if out of nowhere, seemingly unrelated to its immediate context. Such manifest originality automatically raises the question of the origin of a poetic utterance. In Kuzmin’s pantheon of lifelong favorite authors, Pushkin is not the only one who represents this concept. Another prominent example would be Goethe. Particularly relevant, however, is St. Francis of Assisi, the progenitor of the Italian literary tradition. While the culture of the early Italian Renaissance, including its rich legacy in the sphere of the visual arts, left a deep mark on Kuzmin’s worldview, the “Little Flowers” of St. Francis—sprouted from the prose of the late Middle Ages— and the saint’s poetry were particularly important.⁹⁸ As Alessandro Vettori writes in his

⁹⁶ Irina Podgaetskaia describes Classical style is traditionally associated with “naturalness.” She points out that Goethe reverses this trope and “accepts” the right of nature to create Classical works. I. U. Podgaetskaia, “K poniati’u ‘klassicheskii stil’.” *Izbrannye stat’i* (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2009), 93-119, 95-96.

⁹⁷ Tomashevsky, *Pushkin i Bualo*, 62. Turgenev quotes Mérimée in his “Speech on the Unveiling of a Monument to Pushkin in Moscow.”

⁹⁸ Shmakov, “Blok i Kuzmin,” 344-345. The connection between “On Beautiful Clarity” and St. Francis may be gleaned from the following words, quoted by Shmakov from Kuzmin’s “Meditations and Bafflements by Piotr the Hermit”: “A truly grandiose and noble conception of

Poets of Divine Love: Franciscan Mystical Poetry of the Thirteenth Century, as a poet, Francis was after the clarity of Adam's speech prior to the fall.⁹⁹ The saint's teaching is a radical declaration of return to the original, ever-present Edenic nature. This view resonates with Kuzmin's understanding of poetry as the original idiom. Although "On Beautiful Clarity" is stylized, and is deliberately worldly and ironic, it is after a similar idea.¹⁰⁰ The origin myth with which the essay begins also tells the story of clarity as Kuzmin understands it. Drawing on sources, from St. Francis to Pushkin, from Goethe to Henri de Régnier and Anatole France, Kuzmin's "chaste" poetics revives Classicism as the tradition of inchoation.

Arguing about clarity Ivanov and Kuzmin suggested two distinct models of a beginning. Ivanov based his in Romantic philosophy, which he articulated using ornate syntax, archaisms, awkward neologisms and general opaqueness that consciously evoked Russian Baroque Classicism, among other poetic systems. Both he and Bely continue in the footsteps of the Russian Romantics—such as Vladimir Odoyevsky and Fyodor Tyutchev—who overlapped with Pushkin and succeeded his poetics of clarity.¹⁰¹ Boris Gasparov argues that, contrary to popular perception that Pushkin's poetry instantly and definitively entered the pantheon of Russian

the world always leads to the tenderness [*umilennost'*] of St. Francis, comic operas of Mozart and serene satires of France."

⁹⁹ Alessandro Vettori, *Poets of Divine Love: Franciscan Mystical Poetry of the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), xvii.

¹⁰⁰ In the monograph *Neoclassicism in Russian Architecture of the Early XX Century*, Grigory Revzin writes that the World of Art appear to be unique in the history of art for developing a Neoclassical style from their experiments with stylization. Traditionally, stylization concludes a given style. Kuzmin's stylizations should be viewed in a similar vein, as approaches to a beginning. G. Revzin, *Neoklassitsizm v russkoi arkhitekture nachala XX veka*. (Moscow: Obshchestvo Istorikov Arkhitektury pri So'uze Arkhitektorov Rossii, 1992), 87.

¹⁰¹ Ilya Serman writes about Ivanov's poetic language as at times nearly indistinguishable from such eighteenth century authors as Derzhavin. I. Z. Serman, "Viacheslav Ivanov—nastavnik sovetskikh poetov." *Puti iskusstva: simvolizm i evropeiskaia kKul'tura XX veka* (Moscow: Vodolei Publishers, 2008), 358-379.

classics, the school of “beautiful clarity” fell out of fashion almost as soon as it appeared, in the second half of the 1820s. He observes that Kuzmin’s “Clarism” and Acmeist poetics were nearly the sole inheritors of its principles.¹⁰² Polemicizing with Ivanov, Kuzmin seeks to revive a nearly unprecedented aesthetic. Like Pushkin, who applied Boileau’s *clarté* to the historical moment he inhabited, Kuzmin applies this principle to the exigencies of his time. To this end, the World of Art emphasis on image, fascination with time as the evanescence of phenomena, and especially their interest in stylization became integral components of his concept of clarity as the vitality, historicity and apparent spontaneity of the poetic word. For Kuzmin, the poetic word originates in nothing but itself, and by virtue of this fact it holds the promise of Eden. Here, it is apt to recall Ivanov’s statement that Kuzmin’s “clarity” dissembles. This statement is intended to hint at Kuzmin’s belonging, against his own will, in Ivanov’s camp, or at least Ivanov’s insight into clarity as not quite itself. This is, indeed, the case: the word that originates in itself is not *really* mimetic. A poetics that proceeds from the word rather than from being does not imitate the referent, nor does it seek to affix itself to the invisible Ideal referent. Such a word emerges as its own reality, yet, for Kuzmin it is of vital importance that it *pretends* to imitate.

It is ironic that the argument about clarity would bring to the fore such hermeneutic and communicative difficulties. Ivanov and Kuzmin understood the concept differently. For Ivanov it was an aspect of analytical thought. For him it represented a false grasp on reality. Yet he understood the concept itself in rational terms. But Kuzmin’s poetic clarity resists rational definition, and must be alluded to, illustrated by examples, or be understood in action, as an

¹⁰² Boris Gasparov, *Poeticheskii iazyk Pushkina kak fakt istorii russkogo literaturnogo iazyka* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii Proekt, 1999), 73, 340.

aspect of Pushkin's or Francis' poetry. It is clear, however, that for both poets this concept signified a return to origins.¹⁰³

The polemic about clarity resumed in 1912, now with the participation of Andrei Bely. This time, as the Symbolists persevered in their attack on Kuzmin, they offered their own version of mystical, obscure intelligibility. Rather than speak in the abstract, they introduced the figure of the archetypal poet, Orpheus, as the ideal theurgist in command of the original Symbolist idiom. The entry of this figure into their writing as a character in his own right rendered their version of mystical "clarity" experiential and immediately related to the relationship between not only the self and the word, but the word and image as well. Rather than define or redefine his concept of clarity, Kuzmin defended himself by attacking stylistic and theoretical flaws of his opponents' writing. But several months prior to the reemergence of the polemic, he had revisited clarity in an essay on the subject of one of his favorite operas, *Orpheus and Eurydice* by Christoph Gluck. In it, he also discussed clarity as the relationship between image and sound. The three distinctly different versions of these relationships that emerge from these texts represent three models of clarity as a creative form. In the early 1920s, when Mandelshtam—who in 1912 is still a year away from publishing his first volume of poetry—proffered his own version of clarity, he drew on both the polemic of 1910 and 1912.

Clarity as Creative Form: Three Visions of Orpheus

The polemic on clarity resumed in January, 1912, when the Moscow Symbolist journal *Works and Days* [*Trudy i dni*] published Mikhail Kuzmin's review of Ivanov's new book of poetry, *Cor ardens*, and Andrei Bely's brief essay "Of Cranes and Chickadees" ["O zhuravliakh i

¹⁰³ Michael Wachtel writes: "Indeed, the Symbolists return to an earlier, platonic and time-honored definition of "originality"—as a return to origins." Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism*, 211.

sinitsakh”]. In his review Kuzmin praised Ivanov’s poetry in a somewhat forced, at times almost sycophantic manner, but was also carefully critical of its ambiguities and muddled, oversaturated prosody. In the last paragraph, he politely but assertively defined it as Apollonian and clear, rather than Dionysian and chaotic. The editors of the magazine, Andrei Bely and Emilii Metner, took issue with the last paragraph, and removed it without the author’s permission. Adding insult to injury, Bely’s “Of Cranes and Chickadees,” a brief article that concluded the magazine, contained an overt attack on Kuzmin. Writing under the pseudonym “Cunctator,” Bely argued that as a marker of cultural evolution, “clarity” is an unstable concept: what is clear today becomes obscure tomorrow, while “new speech—is always inarticulate.”¹⁰⁴ Kuzmin may have especially resented the comparison of those who seek clarity in writing to a police precinct “with the appearance of a new civilian police force comes a new zone of clarity [“poiavliaetsia dobrovol’naia politsiia, voznikaet novyi uchastok iasnosti”]. Kuzmin was deeply offended and published a response to the editors of *Works and Days* on the pages of *Apollon*. In it he reiterated his position on clarity, stating that an artist’s religious aspirations should not intrude into the sphere of art theory, that such theory cannot be based on one’s subjective impressions, intimations, and intuition, and that as a representative of the “precinct of clarity,” he upholds the principles of precision and insists that Symbolism originated in France in the 1880s, making it historically inaccurate to trace its origins to Dante and Goethe.¹⁰⁵ As Nikolai Bogomolov observes, Kuzmin responded not only to the immediate situation, but referred to Ivanov’s “Precepts of Symbolism” as well.¹⁰⁶ He addressed the issues of critical method and origin of

¹⁰⁴ Andrei Belyi, “Zhuravli i sinitsy.” *Trudy i dni* 1 (1912), 82-84.

¹⁰⁵ Here he quotes Briusov’s “On Slavish Speech” almost verbatim.

¹⁰⁶ Nikolai Bogomolov’s “The History of One Review” quotes the full text of Kuzmin’s review, Blok and Metner’s letters about the review, the correspondence between Ivanov and Metner, and

poetic speech, both raised in “On Beautiful Clarity,” but applied them specifically the Symbolist idiom. Two years after the publication of “On Beautiful Clarity” and Ivanov’s lectures in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the exchange between Kuzmin and the Symbolists pertained to the problem of clarity, affirming its pertinence to the debates of this time.¹⁰⁷

Works and Days was a direct consequence of the polemic around the “crisis of Symbolism,” intended as an outlet not only for the poetry, but also for the theoretical and critical writings of the “young” Symbolists.¹⁰⁸ The same issue that featured Kuzmin’s review and Bely’s “Of Cranes and Chickadees,” also contained two short articles, both entitled “Orpheus” [“Orfei”]. Their immediate purpose was to present an eponymous series of translated works by European mystics, such as Meister Eckhart and Jakob Böhme. The larger goal, however, was to introduce a new idiom that would bridge the disciplines of poetry, philosophy and religion. As the name of the series and of the poets’ essays attests, the idea was to revive the original, archetypal word interpreted as the “realist symbol.”

In his “Orpheus” Ivanov rephrases his earlier statements from “The Precepts of Symbolism”: mystical thought is communicable only when it is inarticulate.¹⁰⁹ The Orphic idiom that he describes combines the incompatible: Eurydice, equated with Psyche and Vladimir Solovyov’s Sofia—the feminine aspect of Dionysus— and the rational, masculine element,

Kuzmin’s response to *Works and Days* on the pages of *Apollon*. N.A. Bogomolov, “Istoriia odnoi retsenzii.” *Philologica* 1, 1/2 (1994): 135-147.

¹⁰⁷ In “The History of a Review” Bogomolov quotes Blok’s letter to Bely, in which he criticized the first issue of *Works and Days* specifically for following Ivanov’s program, and especially in his polemic with Gumilev, who at this time had already fallen out with Ivanov, and was a month away from announcing the arrival of Acmeism. Blok is also displeased for Ivanov’s “dragging” Kuzmin with him. By this he means Ivanov’s commissioning the review of *Cor Ardens* in the first place. *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁰⁹ V. Ivanov, “Orfei.” *Trudy i Dni* 1 (1912): 60-63, 61.

where the former is obscure, and the latter is “clear.”¹¹⁰ Ivanov proceeds to explain how language accommodates contradiction. Since collective “craving for supra-sensorial knowledge” [“golod sverkhchuvstvennogo poznaniia”] cannot be satisfied by a “clear” idiom, mystical thought should not “sacrifice its depth.” But it should sacrifice it to a certain extent. This measure of intelligibility is “clarity” as “actualization” [“iasnost’ est’ osushchestvlenie”], which he likens to a sacrifice with Christological overtones. Mystical thought—but also the Symbol itself—is like a dark path, at the end of which Orpheus glimpses “a certain light” [“nekii svet”]. The “dark path,” presumably, is the clarity of meaning, while the “certain light” is the obscurity of mystical content. In the concluding paragraph he evokes traditional Orphic imagery, referring to Orpheus as the “sun of the dark depths” and the “night sun.”¹¹¹ This image represents the obscure clarity of “supra-sensorial” knowledge: language that abides by contradiction.

Three years later, in an essay written on the death of the composer Alexander Scriabin, “Scriabin’s View on Art” [“Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo”], Ivanov returns to the theme of Orpheus to interpret the orphic gaze as the artist’s unwarranted and destructive awareness of the mystery that enters the world through his art. Sacrificial actualization within an accessible system of signification—the Apollonian form—necessarily implies forgetting of the sacred content: a kind of death into life.¹¹² When the artist becomes conscious of the sacred significance of his own work, he fails as a theurgist.

¹¹⁰ Aram Asoian, *Semiotika Mifa ob Orfee i Evridike* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2015), 24-26.

¹¹¹ Ivanov’s *Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God* came out in 1904, and he was exceptionally well-acquainted with the history of Orphism. The Orphics practiced a rite called *nyktelia* or “the night-suns.” Victor Terras, “‘The Black Sun’: Orphic Imagery in the Poetry of Osip Mandelstam,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 45:1 (Spring 2001): 45-60, 52.

¹¹² Ivanov, “Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo,” *SS* 3:172-89. Ivanov writes: “Art liberates, but not in equal measure and scope. As for the artist, it serves him best to be as ignorant of himself as a child, rather than have insight into the nature and meaning of his heroic deed: had Orpheus not known that he was leading Eurydice out of the dark kingdom, he would not have turned around

While these ideas suggest that innuendo, omission and allusion are the antidotes to clarity, they also hint that the author is in command matter, and just do avoidance of addressing it directly. Ivanov describes coming into full knowledge of the “original” principle, of finding it “within,” “in the depths,” or “at the end of the path,” and then forgetting it to a “certain extent.” Such careful measurements of the mystical suggest that Ivanov might struggle against his own understanding of language as an essentially rational medium capable of total expression. The Symbol comprises a representation of the mystery, such as the Orphic night sun, and exegetical commentary to it as the “clear” discourse of actualization.

Bely also describes Orpheus as a symbolic representation of Apollonian and Dionysian forces, where the latter is infinitely more important and explicitly identified with Christ. He describes the profound cultural crisis of his age as resulting from losing sight of the singular “Dyonisian” principle that sustains any given culture. Only a synthesis of philosophy, literature and religion can redeem this breach.¹¹³ As Bely describes the kind of synthesizing “Orphic” Symbolist language that might catalyze change, he also puts this idiom to active use:

Orpheus appears, one could say, as the mask of our consciousness—a consciousness of truth rejected by modernity; and that truth is our catacomb, but at that catacomb’s entrance, which joins us too with the world, is the mask of Orpheus.¹¹⁴

to behold the beloved shade, and so would not have lost her [...] As artists approached the mountain tops of theurgy, the mystery of their path revealed itself before their eyes. Then were they struck by the resurrected memory of the One, whom Orpheus called Eurydice: with awe and enamored longing they turned their gaze backward, into the abyss of nonbeing, whence Life Beauty rose, led by them out of darkness—and the magical power abandoned them, and they stayed on this side of the theurgic threshold.”

¹¹³ Andrei Belyi, “Orfei.” *Trudy i dni* 1 (1912): 63-68. Bely writes: “The beginning of any culture is in the involuntary, spontaneous creativity of a nation, discovering its way through images of its creativity; in this sense culture begins with revelation; it is based on religious truth; this truth is imprinted in the past in one or another historical form [...] the moment of revelation is replaced by moments of awareness of the directly discoverable [...]”

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 66.

The passage can be read as a single Orphic Symbol. The Orphic word—the mask of Orpheus—represents a certain truth, rejected by the historical moment, but still embedded in consciousness. The word that expresses this concealed truth—as the single ontological principle mentioned earlier in the essay—is both the “catacomb” of the truth and its connection with the profane “world.” Bely’s wording is remarkable. Orpheus is: a mask of our awareness, an awareness of a truth, a truth that is a catacomb, a catacomb with the mask of Orpheus presiding over the threshold. The circular relay race of significations, whereby the name Orpheus appears at the beginning and the end of the sentence like bookends, and coincides with the idea of depth or the “catacombs” and exteriority as the mask and the threshold, conveys the idea that the poet turns around to behold himself. The orphic symbol consciously signifies itself: the signifier and signified are one and the same, albeit within different parameters.¹¹⁵ The sentence also demonstrates the *mise en abyme* effect of this mystical tautology. Orpheus represents “x” within which, like a seed, there is an image of Orpheus, which represents “x” on a different scale.

Bely interprets the function of this tautological symbol in the context of the Apollo—Dionysus relationship:

On the surface of the scholarly/philosophical and aesthetic life of the present the persistent labor of comprehending the variously branched pathways of culture is being accomplished; but we believe that in the depths of the human spirit the revelation of covert symbolism is being accomplished; we believe that the comprehension of the very highest symbols of creativity will fulfill these symbols as real symbolism. In this sense not only is Apollon Musagete restricted by Orpheus as his final limit, but he himself, fulfilled by Orpheus, begins breathing and living in him: the petrified mask of art dissolves; and its cold marble receives

¹¹⁵ Vladimir Feshchenko describes this phenomenon thus: “Bely’s concept of the symbol assumes that the visible conceals the invisible, but that the visible also directs thought so that it may discover the invisible by way of imitation.” Feshchenko references Charles Peirce, who defined an icon as a sign where the signifier and signified resemble each other. Feshchenko, *Laboratoriia logosa*, 183.

movement: for even the stones of graven images can be set in motion by Orpheus.
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The passage elaborates on the concepts of depth and exteriority. Bely hopes that the superficial language of his time will obtain depth by virtue of the hidden work of the symbol concealed within. As the implicit works its way to the surface, the superficial obtains depth. The principle that resides in the “catacomb” of spirit is also the “limit,” or the edge beyond which the “petrified mask” of Apollo transforms into the visage of a living being. Bely’s concept of the symbol is covertly subversive, and acts in accordance with the task that the poet gives it. The concomitance of depth and surface creates the image of an impossible space, and in fact uses spatial thinking to subvert itself. The tautological symbol is the visible agent of the invisible. The obscure symbol strives to connect illusory phenomenal reality with the original principle.¹¹⁷

The Symbolist language of ascendance to the prototype is based in metonymy: a part that represents the whole, and leads to it.¹¹⁸ Ivanov’s dark “path” with a “certain light” at its end and Bely’s tautological symbol connect the Dionysian as the source of knowledge and the Apollonian as its actualization in the world. As the symbol subverts the “superficial” and

¹¹⁶ Belyi, “Orfei,” 66.

¹¹⁷ For Ivanov and Bely, the primacy and spiritual superiority of music as well as poetry resides in its invisible, temporal aspect. In “Symbolism as World View” [“Simvolizm kak miroponimanie”] (1904) Bely argues that time is the “genus” within which the “species,” “inner feelings,” and spatial forms are perceived and organized. It has primacy and is more potent. This is the reason images can be musical but not vice versa: for example one may think of a sculpture as containing the “spirit of music” while music cannot contain “the spirit of sculpture.” For this reason Bely elevates music to the status of ultimate symbol, as most meaningful and most polyvalent, void of limiting signification. He writes that “only those who are myopic in spiritual questions seek clarity from a symbol.” [“tol’ko blizorukie v voprosakh dukha ishchut iasnosti v simvolakh”] For Kuzmin, music can have clarity like any other art form or idea. Moreover, he does not fetishize its temporal quality; to the contrary, he praises it at its most “still.”

¹¹⁸ Oleg Lekmanov observes: “Although the symbolists felt they dwelled in two parallel worlds at once—“here” and “there,” their “here” easily intersected with “there,” breaking the laws of Euclidian geometry.” O.A. Lekmanov, “Stikhotvorenie Mandel’sthama ‘Kazino’ kak manifest i nekrolog.” *Kniga ob akmeizme i drugie raboty* (Tomsk: Vodoleii, 2000), 465. This intersection was crucial to their concept of the symbol.

insinuates the “profound,” it claims knowledge and insight, even if these are inexplicable. Bely’s wording not only illustrates its metonymic nature vividly, but activates its “supra-rational” potential. Ivanov, conversely, uses figurative language to illustrate his idea, utilizing the paradoxical image of a “night sun” for this purpose. He elaborates that Orpheus is the origin of order in chaos, and the origin of chaos within the order. Even contradiction abides in connection: paradox is contiguity.

In Ivanov and Bely’s articles Orpheus embodies the Symbolist idiom of “supra-sensorial” knowledge. He represents language that undermines visible and palpable experience, and directs the reader toward the invisible, intangible “music” of the universe. Bely actively subverts image, while Ivanov instructs on the importance of subversion. The Symbolists’ Orphic word derives directly from “source” or the “origin.” It is a metonymy, which Bely interprets as an iconographic emblem, whereby the signifier and the signified—the origin and the text, the speaker and the word, and the sound and the image—are identical but manifested within different planes of existence. Ivanov understands it as a path that allows to course between two realms. For both poets, the “clarity” of image, space, intelligibility is both an obstacle to overcome, and a necessary source of tension.

Intentionally or inadvertently, these two essays and Bely’s overtly anti-Kuzminian “Of Cranes and Chickadees” cast Kuzmin as an anti-Orpheus. Yet several months prior to Ivanov and Bely’s publications in *Works and Days*, Kuzmin wrote of clarity in terms that invalidate the Symbolist understanding of his idea. Orpheus figures in his essay as well, albeit as the hero of Gluck’s famous opera, rather than a theurgist. Surprisingly for a text about music, image plays a role of primary importance.

“Orpheus and Eurydice of Chevalier Gluck” [“Orfeii i Evridika Kavalera Gl’uka”] was originally published in the tenth issue of *Apollon* in 1911, the year that Vsevolod Meyerhold first staged the opera. The production ran through 1913, was restaged several times in 1919, and again in 1920-1921, when Mandelshtam saw it.¹¹⁹ In 1922 Kuzmin published a collection of his critical writings, *Conventions* [*Uslovnosti*], which included his essay on the opera, immediately followed by another, very brief article on the same subject, entitled “The Theater of Motionless Action” [“Teatr nepodvizhnogo deistviia”]. Like most of Kuzmin’s critical writings, these essays examine the work of art in terms of its historical background and formal qualities. But since they address Gluck’s masterpiece as a paradigm of clarity, they are also a metatextual elucidation of this concept.

Kuzmin begins with a lengthy quote from Gluck, wherein the composer explains how he achieved the “beautiful simplicity” of his music, and proceeds to demonstrate how little this explanation reflects Gluck’s actual achievement. The composer conceals the truly innovative characteristics of his work, making a series of misleading statements regarding its origins and the “devices” used:

All his transformative activities took place in addition to and even against his principled statements, for what had been asserted in them had long been accomplished in practice, perhaps even more fanatically and therefore less artistically.¹²⁰

Like Kuzmin’s “disassembling clarity,” “beautiful simplicity” goes hand-in-hand with deliberate prevarication. Aware of the gap between his masterpiece and the exigencies of his time, the artist smuggles it contraband. But while personal allegiances to a particular school of thought distort

¹¹⁹ Nataliia Khmeliova, “Raiiskoe viden’e.” *Nashe nasledie* 66 (2003): 88-98.

¹²⁰ Kuzmin, ““Orfei i Evridika’ kavalera Gl’iuka,” *PE* 3: 543-549, 545. Kuzmin’s use of the word “device” [“*priem*”] possibly references Shklovsky’s “Art as a Device,” first published in 1917 and reprinted in 1919.

the vision of the contemporaries', in time the truth is revealed: "distance so smoothes the detailed differences, because of which art wars are ignited... ["otdalenie tak sglazhivaet detal'nye razlichii, iz-za kotorykh vozgoraiutsia khudozhestvennye voiny..."]¹²¹ Contrary to Bely's contemptuous remarks in "Of Cranes and Chickadees," Kuzmin does not equate clarity with the fleeting idiom of the present. In fact, the poets share the view that time eventually overturns conventional axioms, and often proves faulty the criteria by which contemporaries judge each other's success.

Kuzmin locates the real origins of *Orpheus and Eurydice* in the Italian musical tradition. He calls it Gluck's "most Italian opera," and associates Italian influence with "non-rationality": "Of course he [Gluck] broadened French opera, introducing into it the musical and non-rational emotionalism of the Italians" ["konechno, on rasshiril frantsuzskuiu operu, vnesia v nee patetizm muzykal'nyi i neratsional'nyi ital'iantsev"].¹²² Not only does Kuzmin reveal that clarity emerges out of a "non-rational emotionalism," but also that for him the "Italian" integrity, and a "silvery, hazy simplicity" of the music has a spiritual meaning. Its "liturgical" and "Virgilian" immobility gives the impression of an "arrestingly still image and lament" ["plenitel'no zastyvshoi kartiny i placha"].¹²³

Kuzmin's second essay on *Orpheus and Eurydice*, "The Theater of Motionless Action," elaborates on the paradoxical notion of "still" music as ritualistic. He writes that the opera is so minimal and schematic, that it would be monotonous and nearly dull, if not for its solemnity, and its ritualistic, "circle dance" quality. The music reveals its profound meaning and an inner

¹²¹ In the second chapter of this study I discuss Kuzmin's reflection in his 1934 diary that he prefers myopia to spectacles for the same reason.

¹²² Kuzmin, "Orfei i Evridika," *PE* 3:545.

¹²³ Kuzmin, "Orfei i Evridika," *PE* 3:546, 547.

dynamism when viewed as an aspect of a liturgical performance.¹²⁴ Its originality resides in its relationship to religious Italian music, especially the oratorio. The description of *Orpheus and Eurydice* as a “still image,” and as “motionless” and “liturgical” suggests a meditation on the music as an image in its own right. The author does not describe Golovin’s famous decorations, Fokin’s choreography, or the experience of synesthesia as an active visualization of the music. The clarity of the sound is an image with no content other than itself. The mechanism of intelligibility, therefore, is metaphoric: the music would not be “clear” if it did not evoke an image of itself. As a structure that compares and differentiates, metaphor brings together Orpheus and Eurydice, sound and image, the artist and his means of expression, to the same degree that it keeps them apart.

The essays on Gluck’s opera address clarity as the quality of aesthetic intelligibility enabled by a binary structure: music is “whole” when it is like an image. Unlike the Symbolists, who valued the idea of connection and identity with the “original principal,” Kuzmin emphasizes separation and difference as a key feature of the creative process. This concept is prominent also in “On Beautiful Clarity,” where the origin myth is recounted in the following manner: “the world first emerged from a condition of chaos, upon which blew the separating spirit of God” [“mir vperve vyshel iz sostoianiia khaosa, nad kotorym veial razdeliaushchii Dukh Bozhii”]. The sentence that describes origination, elides its cause: the world emerges spontaneously, as if of its own volition, and as the result of differentiation. The poetics that proceeds from the word rather than from being—is based in metaphor as the figure of speech that represents the contrasting ideas of wholeness and unity, and division and separation. Just as sound and image—

¹²⁴ Kuzmin, “Teatr nepodvizhnogo deiistviia,” *PE* 3:549-550.

Orpheus and Eurydice—are a couple that must always be apart, so the word must be apart from the world in order to become the world.

Clarity as the state of creativity or an aspect of aesthetic experience overrides the question of origin, but does not nullify it. Kuzmin writes that several elements of Gluck's opera: "fuse into one whole to such an extent that one no longer thinks of the historical origins of this silvery hazy and blissful music," yet he dedicates a lot of thought to the precise nature of these very origins. It is important for several reasons that he locates them in Italy, and defines them as "non-rational." First, this is a polemical response to Ivanov and Bely, whose perception of clarity as the "French" *clarté* Kuzmin seeks to dismiss. The French writers mentioned in "On Beautiful Clarity" belong to the tradition of the same "Italian" clarity. Second, it emphasizes the connection between clarity and vision. Renaissance Italy is the origin of clarity not only because the specific historical sources that may have inspired Gluck were Italian, but because of the powerful association between the Italian Renaissance and visual culture. There is an obvious connection between the "Italian" and the "Pushkinian" clarity. Indeed, the aforementioned French authors, Goethe, and such writers of antiquity as Apuleius, whom Kuzmin loved, could also exemplify it. Any writing that evokes an image of an "original" wholeness and aliveness is "clear," but its symbolic historical birthplace is Italy as the birthplace of a "ritualistic," "non-rational" vision.

Ivanov' and Bely's respective models of clarity as the fundamental, "original" relationship between the poet and the word, and Kuzmin's discussion of Gluck's music as such a model, address not only the specific relationship between the artist and his means of expression, but also between the "image"—or meaning—and sound. For the Symbolists image, is an obstacle between the theurgist and the "origin." The effort to overcome this obstacle, yet not

succumb to the ultimately destructive appeal of Dionysian “music” as the ultimate source of all, contributes to the creative tension in their work. Their underlying claim, however, is knowledge of both realities and the ability to navigate between them. Their “Orphic” word is, therefore, essentially metonymic, based in contiguity. Kuzmin, conversely, dismisses the idea that origins are synonymous with causation, and approaches the relationship between sound and image as complementary, dialogic and simultaneous. He does, however, look to the Italian Renaissance as the prototype of this relationship. His “Orphic” word is essentially metaphoric and based in the paradoxical simultaneity of identity and difference.

Osip Mandelshtam and the Clarity of Origin

The third subject of my dissertation, Osip Mandelshtam, was twenty-five years younger than Ivanov, and twenty years younger than Kuzmin. Born in 1891 in a Jewish family in Warsaw, he spent his childhood and youth first in the imperial environs of St. Petersburg, in Pavlovsk, and then in the city itself. He studied in the progressive and prestigious Tenishev School that accepted Jews as well as aristocrats like the Nabokovs. In 1907-1908 he lived in France and traveled in Italy before entering Heidelberg University to study Romance languages and Renaissance art. As aforementioned, in 1910 he was in Germany, but paid great attention to the polemic on the “crisis of Symbolism” from afar. His eventual decision to leave his mentor and join Gumilev’s “Poets’ Guild,” and then, together with Gumilev, Sergei Gorodetskii, Anna Akhamtova, Mikhail Zenkevich and Vladimir Narbut, to embark upon the Acmeist project, was a pledge of allegiance to a different aesthetic philosophy. Mandelshtam’s programmatic poems as “The Casino”(1912), “The Notre Dame”(1912), and “The Admiralty”(1913), or the essay “The Morning of Acmeism” (1912) assert the value and beauty of clear, logical, “Apollonian” thought.

Mandelstam tends to veer away from juxtaposing the “Apollonian” and the “Dionysian,” never resorting to these specific terms. In “The Notre Dame,” for example, Mandelshtam writes about the “rational chasm” of the “gothic soul” [“dushi goticheskoi rassudochnaia propast”].¹²⁵ Ivanov would consider such “Apollonizing” of the “Dionysian” sacrilegious. Yet, while at this time Mandelshtam openly polemicizes with Ivanov and Symbolism in general, scholars such as John Malmstad believe that he retains respect for his mentor for the rest of his life.¹²⁶

Classical culture—refracted through the lens of French Neoclassicism—prevails in the poet’s first book of poetry, *Stone* (1913), as well as his second one, *Tristia* (1922). Kuzmin may not have had as profound and lasting an effect on Mandelshtam as he did, for example, on Akhmatova, but there is no doubt, that especially *Tristia* (1922), a collection of poems that Kuzmin named, experiment with his idiom. As aforementioned, the Acmeists, as a self-consciously Neoclassical, neo-Parnassian movement, referred to him as their teacher. Kuzmin’s “elevation to stardom” coincided with the period when Mandelshtam began to write poetry as a teenager, and it stands to reason that he would have paid close attention to his work starting in those years.¹²⁷ Kuzmin lived with Ivanov when Mandelshtam began to appear at the Tower, and was involved at *Apollon*, a magazine that played an important role for Mandelshtam and the rest of the Acmeists. For a period of time Kuzmin was also close with Gumilev, and frequented his “Poets’ Guild.” In sum, he was consistently present in the same circles as the younger poet.

In 1910, while in Germany, the young poet paid enough attention to the literary events unfolding in Moscow and St. Petersburg to respond to them poetically. His very first publication

¹²⁵ Mandel’shtam, *PSS* 1:58, 62, 66; 2:22-26.

¹²⁶ John E. Malmstad, “Mandel’shtam’s ‘Silentium’: A Poet’s Response to Ivanov” in Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (eds.), *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher* (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1986), 236-252.

¹²⁷ Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 293.

appeared in 1910, in the same July-August issue of *Apollon*, where Briusov published his retort to the “young” Symbolists, entitled “On Slavish Speech.” The polemic around the crisis of Symbolism was in full swing, and as John Malmstad demonstrates, one of Mandelshtam’s poems among those published, “Silentium,” also responds to Ivanov’s “Precepts of Symbolism.” An ekphrastic reference to Sandro Botticelli’s “The Birth of Venus,” the poem expresses the desire to return to primordial silence before an unnamed “she” is born. Malmstad believes that the poem’s tension comes from the awareness that this desire is unattainable and that a return to an “indestructible bond” with existence is not possible. He argues that this represents a major departure from Ivanov’s theories.

While the poem never addresses “clarity” directly, it evokes the issue at the heart of the polemic: the origin, and the original word. Anxiety about the irreversible destruction of the original, universal bond is a prominent theme in Mandelshtam’s first collection of poetry. In his second book, *Tristia*, the longing for lost primordial unity transforms into the longing for a strange “meaningless” and “blissful” word. Yet Mandelshtam’s oeuvre also contains a different kind of sentiment toward origins. In the autobiographical *The Noise of Time* (1925), he uses distinctly Symbolist vocabulary, when he contrasts St. Petersburg with the life within his Jewish family. St. Petersburg is a “dream,” and a “splendid veil over the abyss,” threatened by the destructive, ritualistic, “uterine” “Judaic chaos” that the narrator “has always fled.” He writes that the “origin” is not the home, describes the unfathomable, “wild” sound of the Hebrew names of the Jewish holidays, and in another place in the text mentions his father’s awkward, stilted use of the Russian idiom.¹²⁸ Mandelshtam’s relationship to the notion of origin is therefore twofold. He rejects his “Dionysian”—but also Jewish—birthright as alienating and foreign, and he longs

¹²⁸ Mandel’shtam, *Shum vremeni*, PSS 2:213, 223.

for the obviously foreign—the Classical—as his true origin. Mandelshtam’s Classicism in this context is not only the sum of all types of European Classicism, but also its Romantic counterpart.

Gregory Freidin observes that Mandelshtam’s ambition to become a “Russian” poet mirrored Russia’s—or at least St. Petersburg’s—ambition to become “European,” and so become something that presumably it was not.¹²⁹ It is all the more true, then, that Mandelshtam’s “Silentium” expresses a longing for the original, universal bond as the other *other*. If in *The Noise of Time* the narrator’s native Judaism is an uncomfortable fit, while the Apollonian dream of St. Petersburg, and the Russian language feel like home, then the silent word in “Silentium” is neither Dionysus nor Apollo, but a third deity, one that is more real than the dream-like Petersburg.¹³⁰

In Mandelshtam’s “Silentium” Venus appears before her birth—for the reader she is “born” as a specific image, although the poem clearly addresses the instance before her birth. Words appear to grasp silence: she is meaning prior to articulation, or perhaps even meaning before meaning. But since she is an origin that does not yet exist, one must give birth to it. Indeed, one emerges from what one creates: the origin is the progeny, but both are equally strange to the speaker, who therefore “originates” in the unknown.

Mandelshtam’s “original” word represents continuity based in separation: a word that is original and remembered at once. Unlike Ivanov, who intended Symbolism to be a “recollection” of the primary, hierophantic idiom invested with mystical meaning, Mandelshtam understands memory as spontaneous, and so as preceded by an interruption. Interruption as an emblem of the loss of knowledge becomes its own rhetorical place—a *topos*.

¹²⁹ Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 22.

¹³⁰ More on Mandelshtam’s relationship to the idea of origin: *Ibid.*, 50, 54.

In Mandelstam's poetics this concept of memory applies also to the relationship between the poet and his interlocutor, as well as the structure of the word itself. The speaker addresses the next poet, the interlocutor, who will have the task of interpreting his address through the prism of cultural memory. In this context, "clarity" is the constant that persists in poetic language in spite of the transformations that are inevitable in the interpretative act. Similarly, the image and the word, as well as the semantic and phonetic components within the word relate to each other as a continuum and discrete elements at once. This approach transforms the aesthetic function described by Kuzmin in the essays on *Orpheus and Eurydice*, whereby music is perceived as an "image" in its own right, into a dynamic function of making meaning. To allot the unknown its rightful place within the text, to "voice" this *other*, and moreover to conceive of this relationship as genealogical, is to enact the "Dionysian" word that is both subject and predicate, being and action at the same time. Such poetics is in possession of a "clarism" of the impossible and the obscure.

For Mandelstam poetic language itself reflects this concept of stability as existing only within the process of transformation. He rejects the notion of an ideal, permanent and exclusive idiom. Moreover, he associates the vernacular with the speech act. Polemicizing with the Symbolists in an essay entitled "Vulgata" (1922-1923), Mandelstam evokes the history of the Russian language, and references the "feud between the Russian worldly, *spoken* idiom and the written idiom of the monks" ["bor'ba russkoi, t.e. mirskoi bespis'mennoi rechi <...> s pis'mennoi rech'u monakhov"].¹³¹ The bookish writing of the Byzantine monks, associated here with Ivanov, is in his view vastly inferior to the living word. For Mandelstam, the trajectory of Russian literature unfolds along the path of secularization, away from the ritualistic language,

¹³¹ Mandel'shtam, "Vulgata," *PSS* 2:140-143. The italics are mine.

and away from the page. While his “vulgate” is often “priestly” in its own right, it is always evocative of speech.

Love of enunciation combined with the perception of the poetic word as inherently polyphonic, contributes to what I term the “epic” intentionality of Mandelshtam’s work. Commenting on Mandelshtam’s inclination toward the epic, Freidin situates it in the context of the Symbolist experiments with this genre: “Mandelshtam’s tendency to start *ab ovo* may be traced to the epic framing of the lyric made so effective by the “trilogy” of Aleksandr Blok. This new generic convention placed a great value on the notion of ‘origins’—as an instance prefiguring the poet’s eventual fate <...>”¹³² Mandelshtam, however, does not introduce the epic using a compositional device, such as a narrative “framing” of the lyric, but as the word’s intention to remember. Since for the poet memory supersedes biography and is communal and historical, the word becomes a record of the many within the one. In the 1910 essay “François Villon” (rewritten in 1927) Mandelshtam describes the poetic word thus: “The lyric poet is naturally bi-gendered, capable of endless splitting for the sake of internal dialog” [“Liricheskii poet po prirode svoei— dvupoloe suchshestvo, sposobnoe k beschislennym raschshepleniiam vo imia vnutrennego dialoga.”]¹³³ But the word is more than dialogic: it is a dynamic polyphony. Therefore, as Mandelshtam polemicizes on clarity with his teachers, his response purposefully also becomes a record of the polemic on clarity. As Mandelshtam’s “clear word” incorporates, assimilates and even personifies their writing, it ultimately serves as a symbol of the collective

¹³² Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 40, 296-297. Freidin mentions Said’s *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, where the author describes a beginning as “transitive” or “intransitive.” Freidin suggests that the concept of an “intransitive” beginning suits the Acmeists, who were interested in the notion of origin, while the Futurists pursued a “transitive” beginning as they strove toward building a new world. Transitivity understood as a relationship to the world as object, and as the idea of continuity was no less important for the Acmeists than for the Futurists.

¹³³ Mandel’shtam, “François Villon,” *PSS*, 2:13-21, 17.

poetic effort to forge a new model of humanism , one that would represent an alternative to the “Enlightenment” paradigm rejected by Ivanov in 1910. For all three poets this model is based on the specific relationship between the poet and the word, and the word and the image.

Chapter 2

The “Identity Poetics” of Viacheslav Ivanov¹³⁴

Clarity or Obscurity? Critical Deliberations about Ivanov’s Poetics

Ivanov’s poetry invited allegations of obscurity from the start. For example, in 1909 Osip Mandelstam wrote to Ivanov: “Simply put, you are the most incomprehensible, the darkest poet of our time...” [“Vy—samyi neponiatnyi, samyi temnyi, v obydennom slovoupotreblenii, poet nashego vremeni...”]¹³⁵ Valery Briusov and Aleksandr Blok numbered among authoritative voices who agreed with this assessment.¹³⁶ But in more recent criticism to discuss Ivanov’s “clarity” is to argue against the notion that his writing is too opaque. Among modern scholars Sergei Averintsev wrote several essays defending Ivanov’s “clarity.” In “Symbolic Systematization in the Poetry of Viacheslav Ivanov” [“Sistemnost’ simvolov v poezii Viacheslava Ivanova”], he suggests that a system of symbols with a very stable and clear meaning subtends Ivanov’s poetry. Though complex, the relationship among these symbols can be diagramed. This type of poetry is highly rational, suggests the scholar, but is poetry nonetheless. Averintsev concludes his essay thus: “Viacheslav Ivanov’s poetry, so often found to

¹³⁴ Sergei Averintsev proffers the term “identity poetics” as a reference to Schelling’s “identity philosophy.” Averintsev explains that by “identity” [*tozhdestvo*] of Ivanov’s poetics, he means the strict correspondence between the poet’s worldview, the structure of his symbols, and the “texture” of his poems. Sergei Averintsev, “Poezii Viacheslava Ivanova,” *Voprosy literatury* 8 (1975): 145-192, here 167.

¹³⁵ O. Mandel’shtam, *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyriekh tomakh*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Art-Business-Center, 1999), 4:14.

¹³⁶ On Ivanov as difficult and opaque see Valery Briusov, *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, 7 vols., (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1973), 6:88-109, and Aleksandr Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii v devyati tomakh*, 9 vols. (Moscow-Leningrad, 1962), vol. 7. On Ivanov as a representative of the tradition of “difficulty” see Ilya Serman, “Vyacheslav Ivanov and Russian Poetry of the Eighteenth Century.” *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher* (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1986), 190-208; Pamela Davidson, “The Legacy of Difficulty in the Russian Poetic Tradition: Contemporary Critical Responses to Ivanov’s “Cor Ardens.” *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, Vol. 35, # ½, (Jan.-Jun., 1994): 249-267.

be dark, in fact proves to be uncommonly clear—a poetry of distinct contours and hard, starkly revealing sense.”¹³⁷ In another essay, “Viacheslav Ivanov’s Poetry” [“Poeziia Viacheslava Ivanova”], Averintsev asserts that while Ivanov often praised Dionysian chaos as the source of creativity, he was a remarkably lucid thinker and writer: “As a source of poetic motivation... Ivanov’s cult of chaos appears to be an apparent nuisance.” He suggests that the definitive feature of this poet’s masterworks is disciplined logic—in other words, clarity. Moreover, Ivanov’s writing is rich in visual imagery that is very clearly defined by its sharp edges and smooth textures, such as precious stones and crystal. Averintsev points out that even the weather in Ivanov’s poems is usually crystalline. On a typical day in an Ivanov poem the skies are clear, there is a gentle breeze, the temperature is comfortable, while at night the sky is illuminated with bright stars. This “heraldic” rationalism derives from the sharp delineation of each object from its surroundings and its function as “a semantic figure of itself.” Ivanov’s relationship to words parallels his relationship to images: each word is distinct from the other, with clear contours and a clear and stable meaning.¹³⁸

The question of whether Ivanov’s poetry is truly “clear” or “obscure” is a vexing one. In 1912, joining the clarity-obscurity debate and arguing against Kuzmin, Bely writes: “We see a new ‘horizon’ emerge, one that does not correspond with other ‘horizons’ that we ourselves have created. It therefore seems to us to represent chaos and confusion, for the novel word is always inarticulate. ...What yesterday seemed all too clear, even offensively clear...today appears suspiciously vague...”¹³⁹ Bely makes an important point: to determine whether something is clear or obscure, it is first necessary to establish the nature of the criteria themselves. He posits

¹³⁷ S. Averintsev, *Poety*. (Moscow: Yazyki russkoi kul’tury, 1996), 165-187, 187.

¹³⁸ Averintsev, “Poeziia Viacheslava Ivanova,” 166.

¹³⁹ Andrei Bely, “Zhuravli i sinitsy.” *Trudy i dni* 1 (1912): 82-84.

that “new words” can appear inarticulate at first because they require a “new kind of vision” that lags behind the creation itself. With respect to a work of art, clarity is momentary and may be lost as time passes. Clarity, in his view, is contingent on history and the standards of the moment. And yet the debate over Ivanov’s poetry has persisted for over a century, suggesting that at least in this case the lack of consensus has resisted the passage of time. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that the question regarding the actual “clarity” or “obscurity” of Ivanov’s poetics is not well formed, and that it would be more productive to determine why such diametrical opposition has arisen.

Clarity was an important and problematic theme for Ivanov. It was he, and not Kuzmin, who introduced it as a concept in the Symbolist lexicon well before the 1910 “crisis of Symbolism.” Ivanov employed it in his essays and in his poetry as a sort of philosophical contronym, at times a distinctly positive and at others an equally negative term. It is all the more important to trace Ivanov’s thoughts on the term to its origins predating his own theories.

Clarity: A Prehistory

A future Symbolist teacher of Dionysian poetics, but then a sixteen-year-old high school student and debutant poet, Viacheslav Ivanov, wrote a poem in 1882 entitled “Clarity” [*Iasnost'*]. As an adult, he must have considered this poem important and quite successful, because he included it in his 1904 book of poetry *Transparence* [*Prozrachnost'*].

Clarity
To V. S. Kalabin

Clear today in heart, in light
With tender soul I harken
To nature's songs in accordant hello
To pinewood studies and whispres ,

Iasnost'
Vl. S. Kalabinu

Iasno segodnia na serdtse, na svete!
Pesniam prirody v soglasnom privete
Vnemliu ia chutkoi dushoi:
Vnemliu razdum'iu i shepotu bora,

The wordless voices of heavenly eyes
The splash of the robin's egg river.

Rechi bezmolvnoi nebesnogo vzora,
Plesku reki goluboi.

Restless, morose, like eternal meditations,
Old Sphinxes fall silent and asleep;
Choirs of enchanting reverie advance;
I have no joys, no tears of my own.

Smolkli, usnuli, trevozhny, ugromy,
Starye sfinksy—vechnye dumy;
Dvizhutsia khory plenitel'nykh grez;
Net svoei radosti, net svoikh slez.

Gentle heart of strange joys,
Strange sorrows. Limpid
Trustful eyes openly met
With distant magic imaginings;
The heart, with come-hither dreams.

Radosti chuzhdoi, chuzhdoi pechali
Serditse poslushno. Iasny,
Vzoram doverchivym v'iave predstali
Voobrazhen'ia volshebnye dali,
Serditse maniashchie sny.

The setting and mood of this poem resemble a late Romantic landscape in the spirit of authors such as Aleksei Tolstoi and Afanasy Fet. Common rhymes (svet-privet, grez-slez) and metaphors (the nature that “sings songs,” the sky that has a “gaze,” the forest that “whispers”)—tread the terrain of their epigones.¹⁴⁰ The word “dal” [dal'] which will play a key role in the Symbolist lexicon, migrated here likewise from the Romantic vocabulary, especially in reference to the internal, rather than the natural landscape, to imagination and dreams.¹⁴¹ Romanticism surfaces in the very idea that the poet's surroundings reflect his subjective emotional world and that this subjective emotional world reflects the theme of the poem in turn. Fet's comment that he wrote as though: “the poetic idea has come to him... inspired by a single event or an impression,” could apply to the first stanza of this poem.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ On the importance of Romantic influence on early Ivanov see Svetlana Titarenko, “*Faust nashego veka*”: mifopoetika Viacheslava Ivanova (Saint-Petersburg: “Petropolis,” 2012), 25. Titarenko demonstrates that while Symbolist writers such as V. Briusov were deeply influenced by French Symbolism, Ivanov was much more in the sway of the both European and Russian Neoromantic movements.

¹⁴¹ On “dal” in Symbolist vocabulary see Michael Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 153; Joan Delaney Grossman, “Briusov's Defense of Poetry,” *Issues in Russian Literature Before 1917* (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, Inc., 1989), 199.

¹⁴² Lidiia Ginzburg, *O lirike* (Moscow: Intrada, 1997), 79.

The Romantic influence evident in this poem fed directly into Ivanov's theurgic philosophy. A response to the Idealist philosophy of Immanuel Kant, Romanticism engendered a voice that was by definition partial, and that sought to overcome its own subjectivity.¹⁴³ Ivanov's future theurgism pursued a similar goal and proposed a solution to it. Ivanov wanted to propel poetry beyond Romantic sensibility, and beyond art.¹⁴⁴ He attempted to forge a point of view beyond subjective and therefore partial and time-imbued Romanticism toward an objective, universal order available to the theurgic poet by way of a visionary gift. Such a poet would describe the movement from *realia*, or visible phenomena, to *realiora*, the noumenal absolute, as though it had already happened.¹⁴⁵ The early poem "Clarity" encapsulates Ivanov's Romantic "debts" and foreshadows his quest to resolve the contradiction inherent in Romanticism by moving beyond subjectivity. The concept of "clarity" plays a pivotal role in this endeavor.

In the poem, clarity is the state of equipoise between the subject and the object. The first line of the poem "Clear today in heart, in light" ["iasno segodnia na serdtse na svete! "] establishes a correspondence between self and "other," in this case, a brightly lit landscape. On the subject of such correspondence, Michael Wachtel notes that "in general the Symbolists prized the facility for seeing or creating—similarities."¹⁴⁶ But as the subject observes his beautiful surroundings, and as his thoughts cease and disappear, he dissolves into the scene. The

¹⁴³ Ginzburg, *O lirike*, 90, 121.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Wachtel provides an illuminating overview of the Symbolists' relationship with Romanticism, focusing specifically on Ivanov and his preference for Novalis over Goethe. The latter "limited" the artist by distinguishing between disciplines, and spheres of human interest in general, such as religion and art for example. The former was viewed as the precursor of Symbolism, because by seeking to dissolve boundaries, he adumbrated the concept of "zhiznetvorchestvo," or the artist as a "total" creator, not distinguishable from "the person." Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism*, 118-127.

¹⁴⁵ V. Ivanov, "Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme," *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols, ed. D.V. Ivanov and O. Deschartes (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971-1987), 2:536-561. Hereafter SS.

¹⁴⁶ Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism*, 211.

speaker renounces the very concept of owning one's emotions: "Without their joy, without their tears" ["net svoei radosti, net svoikh slez"]. Instead of "one's joy," there is "joy"; instead of "one's tears," "tears"; instead of "one's gaze," "gaze." In Ivanov's mature work grammatical objects—here joy, tears and gaze—often acquire such agency that they become grammatical subjects independent from the speaker. In "Clarity," the body and the mind of the speaker dissolve into the universe, as equalized symbolic concepts. The "Sphinx," therefore, is a symbol of independent and menacing thought in general. "The heart," no longer a metonymic representation of the poet's emotions—symbolizes love, three times symbolically evoked.

Nevertheless, the non-subjective subject must speak. To create a language that would supersede the merely personal and represent what Vladimir Markov called "the language of the gods" Ivanov looked to literature that preceded modern subjectivity.¹⁴⁷ As he sought "to invent the new and gain the very old," he attempted a universal rather than individual voice via archaic style.¹⁴⁸ In the context of the Russian literary tradition the poetic idiom of such eighteenth century authors such as Lomonosov proved most fitting for the project. Ilya Serman notes that among the Silver Age poets it was Ivanov who "made the decisive turn to the poetics of the XVIII century."¹⁴⁹ A turn toward the grandiloquent style of the eighteenth century and its universal voice enabled Ivanov to resolve the inherent conflict of the Romantic movement: a complicated and overall negative attitude toward eighteenth century poetics.¹⁵⁰ In his essay

¹⁴⁷ Vladimir Markov, "Vyacheslav Ivanov the Poet." *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher* (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1986), 49-59.

¹⁴⁸ Viacheslav Ivanov, "Poet i chern'." *Po zvezdam* (Saint-Petersburg: ORY, 1909), 33-42, 40-41. On the subject of Ivanov's archaisms see Efim Etkind, "V'uchnoe zhivotnoe kul'tury: ob arkhaicheskome stile Viacheslava Ivanova." *Tam vnutri* (Saint-Petersburg: Iz-vo "Maksima", 1996), 135-148.

¹⁴⁹ Ilya Serman, "Viacheslav Ivanov-nastavnik russkikh poetov." *Puti iskusstva* (Moscow: Vodoleii Publishers, 2008), 359.

¹⁵⁰ Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism*, 182.

“Vyacheslav Ivanov and Russian poetry of the XVIII century,” Serman argues that Ivanov’s “faithfulness to the forgotten spirit of a language closest of all in type to that of the ancient languages” is “but an almost literal repetition of Lomonosov’s [...] words from his “Introduction on the Use of Church Books,” where Lomonosov declares that Old Church Slavonic contains the “beauty, richness, majesty, and power of the Hellenic language.”¹⁵¹ It is with respect to the tradition of Lomonosov’s and Derzhavin’s “difficult” poetics, that Sergei Averintsev calls Ivanov’s images “clear” “heraldic emblems.”¹⁵² In “Clarity,” the tendency toward archaisms is not yet pronounced, Ivanov not yet having made his “decisive turn” toward the poetics of the eighteenth century. The poem presages the voice that will speak in his mature works without yet speaking in it. But even here, as the speaker renounces the distinction between self and other, his Joy, Tears and Gaze become emblems in the spirit of Baroque Classicism, beside other emblems, such as Forest, River or Sky. The voice of the speaker is not yet abstracted, but describes the process whereby the specific becomes the universal.

Scholars who have written on the subject of Ivanov’s “archaism” fail to acknowledge that in reverting to the universal aesthetic of the eighteenth century, Ivanov rejected perhaps its most important tenet, namely, the concept of reason. The eighteenth-century poet may have believed, as did Sumarokov, that the poetic word should express an idea with precision and clarity, or he may have written in a grandiloquent language heavy with tropes, as did Lomonosov, but disagreements regarding poetic style always ultimately concerned reason.¹⁵³ In the post-Kantian, and then post-Nietzschean world, rationalism and its most important postulate—that the world is

¹⁵¹ Ilya Serman, “Vyacheslav Ivanov and Russian Poetry of the Eighteenth Century.” *Yale Russian and East-European Publications* 8 (year? Pages?); *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher* (New Haven, 1986), 203.

¹⁵² Averintsev, “Poeziia Viacheslava Ivanova,” 166.

¹⁵³ Lev Pumpianskii, “K istorii russkogo klassitsizma.” *Sobranie trudov po istorii russkoi literatury* (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul’tury, 2000), 30-157.

reasonable and as such, knowable—had lost its currency. Therefore, as Ivanov attempted to surpass Romantic partiality, he moved toward the position of universality while rejecting its conceptual foundation. Paradoxically, he sought his own, private universalism: a partial objectivity.

The last stanza of “Clarity” contains its most important idea and one of the seminal concepts of Ivanov’s future Symbolism. The speaker had lost his subjectivity by the second stanza. Thus, when he states: “Trustful eyes openly met/With distant magic imaginings” [“vzoram doverchivym v’iave predstali/ voobrazhen’ia volshebnye dali,”] the gaze beholding the external equivalent of a dreamscape or vision is no longer quite the subject’s own. The absence of any possessive pronoun to modify “gazes” creates an ambiguity as to the identity of the seer, rendering him more “universal.” Whoever he is, he recognizes his surroundings as something that he has already seen. With respect to vision the speaker’s experience echoes Ivanov’s attitude toward language: the *locus amoenus* is a dream manifested in reality; the new word is the recaptured and resurrected “ancient word.”

Ivanov’s “clarity,” then, is the remembrance of the original image and the recognition that the manifested reality has been seen before. But since in his later poetry the speaker will occupy an exceedingly “universal” theurgic position, this concept will become increasingly problematic. For Ivanov, who, as mentioned above, rejected the conceptual idiomatic underpinnings that yielded his own poetics, the relationship between the subject and the object in his work rested solely on the subject’s visionary faculty. It described a system grounded in nothing but itself. In “Clarity” it is already unclear if, while establishing a correspondence between the inner vision and the exterior “reality,” the visionary overcame his partiality and beheld before him what he saw in a dream, or if the solipsist dreamed up a world wherein he is

the ubiquitous self. If the setting wherein the poet finds himself is a realized dream, is it not a world that starts and ends with the self, i.e. a solipsist world?

Ivanov's poetics are "clear" not only because, as Averintsev observes, his landscapes are brightly lit and his images sharply defined, but because in his work the murky Romantic subjectivity yields to the luminous fields of articulation. His "clarity" begins as an ideological correspondence, free of the discord between the internal knowledge and exterior appearance. It describes an external manifestation (*iavlenie*) of what he already knows inwardly, in the external world. It also communicates the idea of totality, whereby "otherness" vanishes. As the speaker loses his subjectivity, it becomes unclear what remains beyond the self. Ivanov's world implies a total externalization of the self, which signals, paradoxically, its consumption and an internalization. This is precisely what renders Ivanov's "clarity" obscure: without "one" there cannot be an "other," and without this distinction meaning cannot exist.

In "Clarity" the speaker's attitude toward his subject is patently affirmative. In the following decade this attitude changes; Ivanov's first collection of verse, *Pilot Stars* [*Kormchie zvezdy*] (1903), his second one, *Transparence* (1904), and his essays from the turn of the century onward convey a more complicated attitude toward this topic. Kuzmin, who entered the literary arena only a few years after Ivanov, was undoubtedly familiar with Ivanov's body of work from *Pilot Stars* onward.¹⁵⁴ "On Beautiful Clarity" referenced Ivanov's ideas on clarity that appeared in various publications between 1903 and 1910, during a period when the poet vociferously rejected the concept, at least in its incarnation as the French "clarté". There was, however, a

¹⁵⁴ Kuzmin's entry into the St. Petersburg literary circles dates to October 1905, when he first reads his novella *Wings* in Alfred Nurok's salon "Evenings of Contemporary Music." It is secured in 1906, when Valerii Briusov's *Vesy* publishes the novella. J. Malmstad, "Bathhouses, Hustlers, and a Sex Club: The Reception of Mikhail Kuzmin's *Wings*." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, ½ (January- April, 2000): 85-104.

transitional period in Ivanov's evolution as a writer and thinker. While information available about this time in his life is scarce, there is sufficient evidence that "clarity" became an active, operative idea in his development.

Clarity and Classical Scholarship

"Myth as an Objective Reality"

The years between 1886 and the turn of the new century bracketed Ivanov's apprenticeship as a scholar. In 1886 he left Russia for Berlin, to study ancient Roman history with Theodor Mommsen. Ivanov embraced his work. His correspondence with friend and fellow historian I.M. Grevs attests to the fact that he was a dedicated and gifted scholar of antiquity, a focus motivated by a rather negative attitude toward his own day.¹⁵⁵ In 1888 he wrote to his friend A.M. Dmitrevsky: "In actuality, often diving in thought into the past, at times into the future, besides which, many thoughts altogether abstract, I deeply, though often unconsciously, hate the present day, which carries the newspaper *café-chantant* nickname 'Fin de Siècle.' After the ecstasies of Plato, this hybrid mixture sickens the classicist."¹⁵⁶ Bombast notwithstanding, the excerpt communicates a symptomatic idea: Ivanov rejects his own historical moment on the grounds of being a Classicist. Moreover, the superficial hybrid of contemporary culture that he so disdains seems dressed in the Parisian fashion of a Fin de Siècle *flâneur* and *café-chantant* regular. To the decadent Frenchman who represents Ivanov's day he juxtaposes—himself: the unfashionable scholar of the authentic and the Classical.¹⁵⁷ In his view, the contrast between

¹⁵⁵ G. M. Bongard-Levin, N.V. Kotrelev, and E.V. Liapustina, eds., *Istoriia i poeziia perepiska I.M. Grevs i Viach. Ivanova* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006).

¹⁵⁶ Titarenko. "Faust nashego veka", 84.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 48.

antiquity and the culture he dismissed was the contrast between the robust source and the decadent outcome, the profound and the superficial, the coherent and the fragmented.

Ivanov hadn't yet visited France or Italy when he wrote to Dmitrevsky. The letter implicitly attacked an idea of France rather than the place itself. In 1888 Rome was likewise only an idea, but one he obviously favored. It represented coherence and authenticity, and as such it was the opposite of what he had resented in the culture of his time. Unity, singularity, a universal, paradigmatic home: this was what Ivanov sought and saw as the opposite of the fractured reality of his day.¹⁵⁸ Rome, where Ivanov arrived for the first time in 1892 and then stayed until 1895, saw his transformation from historian into poet. But in both scholarship and art he was motivated by the same desire. In 1917 the fifty-one-year-old Ivanov looked back on the time of his apprenticeship: "I was a historian [...] through history I dreamed of single-handedly overcoming society's problems and finding a path to social activity."¹⁵⁹ To recover the lost classical ideal, the one that Rome embodied, was a mission of social imperative. Ivanov's literary efforts were a means to the same end, suggesting that on some level he never truly distinguished between the two occupations. His background was, after all, in philology, and as

¹⁵⁸ Pertinently for Ivanov, Rome and Paris as mutually exclusive appeared in Gogol's story "Rome." Ivanov's words to Dmitrevsky contain Gogolian overtones. In Gogol's "Rome," Paris appears as a monstrous hybrid, a kind of mirage-like exhalation of newspaper and magazine culture, defined by endless impotent café discussions of "current events." The protagonist eventually staves off the siren appeal of this city and returns to his native Rome, returning to his "natural state." For Gogol, Rome is an image of "clarity" par excellence. The words "clear," "clarity" and "clarify" appear numerous times within a brief description of the protagonist's reunification with Rome, driving the point home: visual coherence, inclusiveness and integration of history and its subject, space and the human body, and an enunciated, melodic and yet nearly three-dimensional Italian language create such a sense of clarity that it comes to represent meaning overall, rather than a specific concept. It comes to specifically represent the very possibility of meaning in general.

¹⁵⁹ Ivanov, "Autobiographical Letter to S. A. Vengerov," *SS* 2:14.

For Averintsev on Ivanov as a poet of history, see Averintsev, "Poeziia Viacheslava Ivanova," 191.

Ivanov wrote to I.M. Grevs: “Philology is namely the science of ‘Classical antiquity’ in its full extent: as such, it knows no other method, no other viewing angle, than the historical.”¹⁶⁰ This “historical” approach to language inspired Vladimir Solovyov’s remark that on reading Ivanov’s poetry, one immediately notes the author is a philologist.¹⁶¹ The common goal of both the historian and the poet was to recover the Classical ideal lodged in the obscure depths of antiquity, in the hope of infusing the present with its spirit.¹⁶²

Ivanov the poet shared an agenda with Ivanov the scholar: to return to origins by means of the Classics.¹⁶³ As he eventually sought to revive ancient Greek poetic meters and recycle the poetic idiom of Russian Classicism with its abstract vocabulary—to embrace opaque language as “authentic” and prophetic—he also had in mind a specific geographical route that quite literally led to the “origins” of Western civilization as the place of revelation.¹⁶⁴ A conceptual return to origins corresponded with a physical return to Rome, the city he revisited many times the last decade of the 19th century, where he lived again in 1913 and returned in 1924 until his death in 1949.¹⁶⁵ In later times Ivanov compared his lyric hero to epic characters adrift in a fantastical universe, such as Aeneas or Odysseus.¹⁶⁶ He would write: “The poet wants to be solitary and

¹⁶⁰ G. M. Bongard-Levin et al., eds., *Istoriia i poeziia*, 83. Nikolai Bogomolov considers this admission, which dates to 1894, to be of critical importance in understanding Ivanov as a poet. N. A. Bogomolov, “Viacheslav Ivanov mezhdurimom i Gretsiei.” *Sopriazhenie dalekovatykh* (Moscow: INTRADA, 2011), 19.

¹⁶¹ S. Averintsev, “Viacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov.” *Simvol* 53-54 (2008), 10.

¹⁶² Ilia Serman, “Viacheslav Ivanov—nastavnik sovetskikh poetov.” *Paths in Art: Symbolism and European Culture in the 20th Century* (Moscow: Vodolei Publishers, 2008), 358-379, 361.

¹⁶³ Michael Wachtel writes on the importance of “origins” for the Symbolists in general and for Ivanov (and Belyi) specifically in *Russian Symbolism*, 210.

¹⁶⁴ Lena Silard, “‘Orfei rasterzannyi’ i nasledie Orfizma.” *Germetizm i germeneytika* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Ivana Limbakha, 2002), 51; Averintsev, “Viacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov.” 151.

¹⁶⁵ E. Takho-Godi and A. Shishkin, “Rim Viacheslava Ivanova” in A. Shishkin (ed.), *Ave Roma. Rimskie Sonety* (St. Petersburg: Kalamos, 2011), 68-84.

¹⁶⁶ Titarenko, “*Faust nashego veka*”, 91-101.

withdrawn, but his internal freedom is an internal need of restitution and inclusion in native verse. He invents the new and inherits the old. The hazy mirage of uncharted horizons draws him on: but, making a complete turn, he already approaches his native places.”¹⁶⁷ Yet the oddly literal nature of his quest engenders a different type of iconography. Armed with a Baedeker travel guide, Goethe’s *Italian Journey* and Nietzsche’s *Collected Works* his hero resembles a myopic graduate student of history and philology who enthusiastically retraces the Grand Tour some half a century after it ceased to exist.¹⁶⁸ Ivanov’s literary project was inscribed within the discipline of history: of “*historia*” in the original ancient Greek meaning of the term as an eyewitness account.¹⁶⁹

It was this effort to map the route to the hypothetical point of origins and then refashion the present according to this recovered authenticity that eventually inspired Andrei Bely’s characterization of Ivanov’s scholarly and literary methods as “a confluence of scientific myth with the scientific foundations of fantasy.”¹⁷⁰ The domains of scholarship and fiction have distinct cartographies—yet Ivanov marked the coordinates of his project on both maps as if on one and the same. As a result, the attempted return to the hypothetical origin both inside and outside the domain of history could not but render reality fictitious and dress fiction in the garb of reality. This collapse problematized the reality-based practice of social action. After attending Ivanov’s lecture “On Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism” in 1908 Bely wrote the poet

¹⁶⁷ Ivanov, “Poet i chern’,” *SS* 1:713.

¹⁶⁸ Titarenko, “*Faust nashego veka*,” 101-104. Titarenko describes Ivanov’s itinerary through Rome specifically, as well as his method in exploring the city.

¹⁶⁹ “history, n.” OED Online. Oxford University Press, June 2017. Web. 5 August 2017. Nov. 7. 2015.

N.V. Kotrelev, “‘Videt’ i ‘vedat’ u Viacheslava Ivanova” in E.A. Takho-Godi (ed.), *Viacheslav Ivanov: tvorchestvo i sud’ba* (Moscow: Nauka, 2002), 7-18.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted from Nina Braginskaia’s “Tragediia i ritual u Viacheslava Ivanova” in S. Karpuk (ed.), *Arkhaicheskii ritual v fol’klornykh i ranneliteraturnykh pamiatnikakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), 294-329, 325.

an impassioned letter wherein he addressed the effect of the confusion between fiction and reality.¹⁷¹ He accused Ivanov of hubris and hypocrisy: “You write and speak with such literary ease [...] about how there exists an object of realistic creation, of fact rather than literature; speaking of this in literature, you pretend to the role of prophet: but there will be no prophets, nor can there be any now; it amounts to a kind of lie.”¹⁷² Only prophetic speech was capable of engendering reality. Ivanov’s language, it was implied, did not enjoy the stature necessary for such an endeavor; moreover, history denied such a possibility. Bely believed that to claim knowledge of trans-historical truth in literature is unethical. The effort of the Decadents to refashion life in accordance with aesthetic laws was not unlike the effort to refashion both art and life according to the laws of a posited objectivity: both ignored or strove to negate the forces of history.

Ivanov premised his claim to authority on the ideas of insight and knowledge. While he implied that this knowledge was sacred in nature, in fact it was based entirely on scholarly research. Ironically, by virtue of being a scholar, he was necessarily aware that the discipline of history from its earliest days contained the notion of partiality and perspective and thus could not make claims to know objective truths. To insist on the objective nature of his findings was to undermine history by means of history. The solution to this tautological quest was the concept of myth, the dominant subject of his research and a concept he placed not only at the center of his theories, but his persona. “Myth as *objective* reality”—this was Blok’s summary thesis of

¹⁷¹ E.V. Glukhova, “Pis’mo Andreia Belogo k Viacheslavu Ivanovu o doklade ‘Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme.’” *Iz istorii simvolistskoi zhurnalistiki* (Moscow: Nauka, 2007), 118-126.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 124.

Ivanov's 1908 lecture in Saint Petersburg.¹⁷³ Ivanov viewed myth as an alchemist views the philosopher's stone. This precious, immutable substance—produced by history via poetic alchemy, the juncture of history, religion and literature—trumped the notion of a subjective perspective.

From the late 1880s and throughout the 1890s the poet became increasingly fascinated by ancient Dionysian cults. This timeline suggests that this interest emerged in tandem with his attraction to Rome and his physical relocation to this city. Several years after his arrival in Italy he gave up the original topic of his dissertation to concentrate entirely on the Dionysian mysteries, even going to Athens to research the ancient cults on site for the duration of 1901. This research eventually culminated in *Dionysus and Pre-Dionysianism* [*Dionis i pradiionisiistvo*], defended as a dissertation only in 1921 and published as a book in 1923.

Ivanov was more than dedicated to his subject. Its role as a cornerstone of his persona is evident for instance in his marginalia on Aleksandre Benois' 1909 article "Awaiting the Hymn to Apollo" ["V ozhidanii gimna Apollonu"]. The article appeared on page five of the first issue of Sergei Makovsky's magazine *Apollon*, and served as a manifesto for the writers and artists gathered under the aegis of this magazine. Ivanov's comment is especially significant in that it echoes Bely's objections to his own 1908 lecture.

Inadvertently corroborating Bely's statement that the time of prophets had passed, Benois wrote that while the contemporary age was a "long night" of chaos and utter dissolution, it would soon end. A genuinely religious aesthetic would glue together the scattered shards of spirituality, artistic creation and everyday life. Benois introduced the dichotomy of Dionysus and Apollo, using the former deity to symbolize the age of chaos and spiritual death and the latter to exalt

¹⁷³ A. Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki: 1901-1920. Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, 8 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1965), 8:104. The italics are mine.

form, order and future peace. He associated Dionysus with Christ, juxtaposing them both to a joyous, beautiful God, whose followers would profess a truly Classical aesthetic. He also claimed that the late eighteenth-century French Classicism was unable to create a viable Apollonian ideal. Pedantic and dull, it failed to understand the vibrant nature of Classicism and studied the Greek originals by systematically copying them. In conclusion Benois writes:

We need to believe and pray. And how not believe, if only to let arise in your soul the whole image of him who since the very first days of creation has led the holy roundelays of beauty? What on earth resembles Him? Perhaps He's only fantasy and figment? Perhaps He doesn't actually exist, doesn't actually demand the holy sacrifice of the poet? Perhaps the great clairvoyant Pushkin only jested, spoke literary phrases, but didn't believe?... He didn't forsake humanity in these many centuries of universal oblivion. Neither did we forget Him, but simply didn't recognize him, took Him for another, for such was our need. A need to illuminate the depths of the human heart and flower them with beauty. A need for holy sacrifice to summon Francis of Assisi and Saint Teresa... masses and masses of sacrificial minds and souls. And now, completing the whole cycle, it's time once again to remember the body. We need to prepare it to shine with beauty, but moreover to initiate its devotions unto Him who demands devotions unto Himself.¹⁷⁴

Beside the introductory words “We need to believe and pray” [“Nuzhno poverit' i molit'sia”]

Ivanov writes this peeved commentary:

Who? With what? Is Dionysus a condition in God; Apollo, his form? But where is God? And like Annensky, Benois goes on about religion, yes religion—but *which*? I don't want burning altars before *Néant* and liturgical roundelays around empty space. Principally better would be to practice simply and specially... *art* for art's sake. I hate esurient impotence in rebus divinis... Religion is religion! Art is art! I love art for art's sake (it's already secretly religious—but secretly_. I appeal to religious creation, if religion exists. Art as the express surrogate of religion—I disdain it and don't believe in it.¹⁷⁵

In Benois's liberal interpretation of the ancient Greek pantheon Ivanov perceived a threat to his own Classical knowledge. The specter of the “fin-de-siècle” flâneur had once again reared its detestable head. In his essay Benois encroached upon Ivanov's sphere of expertise, exposing French Neoclassicism as a fake, comparing Dionysus and Jesus and drawing the irritating

¹⁷⁴ Aleksandr Benois, “V ozhidanii gimna Apollonu.” *Apollon* 1 (1909): 5-11.

¹⁷⁵ V. Ivanov, “Perepiska s Makovskim.” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 10 (1994): 137-164, 154.

conclusion that the Apollo-Dionysus dynamic was its exact inverse.¹⁷⁶ Benois posited the relationship of the two gods as a duality, and history as an altered age of Dionysus and Apollo. In the latter god he saw the cardinal expression of divinity: order as a manifest universal principle, a precondition of both being and art. In his understanding neo-classicism embodied this principle as an inherent, organic virtue, a pervasive *joie de vivre*. If this weren't enough, the idea that sacred language was transparent rather than obscure offended Ivanov's sense of reverence for the hermetic mysteries and his sense of ownership of their secrets. Ivanov's commentary reiterates Bely's objection but bases it on a different premise: that art should not serve religion, that the two domains should remain separate *if* a given religion is false. Explicit in these words is the author's self-righteous commitment to the Dionysus-Apollo dichotomy as a religion. The right to speak on matters whereof, according to Bely, one should keep silent was for Ivanov a matter of license—something he believed he had as a result of his travels, both physical and intellectual. But while his vexed commentary on Benois's essay laid claim to spiritual authority, his envy was of a scholarly nature. Research was the cornerstone of his religious feeling: spiritual pursuits supported by his study of the myth of Dionysus and indivisible from a historian's fervor. He promoted the notion of "insight" into the mystery of things, but his mysticism stemmed from his discoveries in the libraries of Berlin, Paris, Rome and Athens. His prophecies were all extensively footnoted.

By 1909, with new directions in art again the subject of heated debate, and the "crisis of Symbolism" imminent, Ivanov was in danger of being sidelined. In the first issue of *Apollon* following Benois' manifesto, Annensky's essay "On Contemporary Lyricism," criticized

¹⁷⁶ V. Ivanov. *Dionis i pradiionisiistvo* (Baku: Gosudarstvennaia Tipografiia, 1923), 197-200. In Part 4, Chapter X, Ivanov draws an extensive parallel between the Dionysian mysteries and the passion of Christ.

Ivanov's poetry rather harshly. Myth, wrote Annensky, is by definition accessible to all, whereas Symbolism would have it borderline incomprehensible.¹⁷⁷ Ivanov's meticulous creation—his poetics of knowledge—was founded on the myth of Dionysus. This deity represented the unknown and the unknowable that would upend the edifice of nineteenth-century rationalism. Paradoxically, nineteenth-century rationalism in tandem with a kind of fictional science was the means whereby Ivanov obtained the unknowable. Where there should have been insight, there was only fiction; where there should have been fiction, there was a claim to knowledge. Thus was the "objective reality" of Ivanov's myth revealed as a scholar's idiosyncratic fantasy.

Ivanov's journey toward Rome, his interest in the ancient Greek cults of Dionysus and his poetics of knowledge all date to the 1890s. The quest for "origin" sought a destination at once historical and beyond history: the unknowable yet objectively valid truth that myth represented. This destination was the hypothetical Archimedean fulcrum: the firm and immovable place of pure objectivity whence the poet hoped to "move the world." The concept of "clarity" played an important role in this endeavor. The poem "Clarity" describes clarity as an aspect of the speaker's internal world articulated at a specific locus within the external world. "Clarity" was likewise a state whereby an individual point of view became as if diffused throughout the visual field. The arbitrary individual thereby merged with the universal absolute. These romantic sensibilities were transformed from a state of mind to a method and then applied to historical time so as to distill mystical insight. The city of Rome came to represent the place of origins that corresponded to the subject's earlier indistinct premonition or remembrance.

¹⁷⁷ Innokentii Annenskii, "O sovremennom lirizme." *Apollon* 1 (1909): 12-42.

The Journey toward Clarity:

Roman Antiquity

Ivanov's writings about Rome and Italy in general were a vivid expression of the idea of fulfillment. As in "Clarity," this fulfillment was inextricable from ascent to a supra-subjective vision and a more "objective" perception of the subject matter.¹⁷⁸ At once a city of history and a city outside it, eternally center and periphery, no place could reflect Ivanov's idea better than Rome. As an immutable image of the past, Rome was a cross-section of distinct cultural epochs that retained their historical specificity yet formed a comprehensive whole. It *represented* history without partaking of it. This situated Rome outside the realm of contemporary decadence and within the eternal classical ideal. Rome embodied "clarity" as it was projected onto history. Unsurprisingly, it became the place where Ivanov found his voice as a scholar of a fictional history and a poet of scholarly erudition.

According to Ivanov's "Autobiographical Letter" he approached Rome gradually, spending the better part of 1891 in the Paris Louvre, where he composed his dissertation on the ancient Roman societies of publicans—public contractors and tax collectors.¹⁷⁹ As he wrote in his "Autobiographical Letter," while in Paris he also read the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche brought with him from Berlin in several "little volumes".¹⁸⁰ Nietzsche had a profound and lasting influence on Ivanov. The latter's eventual shift in focus from the study of ancient Roman revenue leasing to the Dionysian cults was largely motivated by a "deep and persistent need to overcome the philosopher specifically in the arena of religious thought."¹⁸¹ Intellectual stumbling

¹⁷⁸ Ivanov vehemently rejected subjectivity as limiting or inhibiting experience. See Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism*, 65.

¹⁷⁹ G. M. Bongard-Levin et al., eds., *Istoriia i poeziia*, 14.

¹⁸⁰ Ivanov, "Autobiographical Letter to S. A. Vengerov," *SS* 2:20.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

blocks the poet encountered included Nietzsche's claim that "god" was a man-made concept and the philosopher's apparent contempt for Christianity that juxtaposed it unfavorably with ancient Greek theology. Ivanov must have been especially disturbed by Nietzsche's claim that language does not lead to the truth, and that a fact is, in a sense, fiction. He came to challenge the philosopher specifically on scholarly grounds and historical fact. He rejected the idea that ancient Greek and Roman religions and Christian civilizations were founded on mutually exclusive principles.¹⁸² To find their common origin was to disprove Nietzsche's historical assumptions and thereby cast doubt on his philosophy.

To set out for Rome was to set out in pursuit of factual knowledge that would bring the subject and object into balance by affirming objectivity. To find a place beyond subjective contingency meant, among other things, to defeat Nietzsche's greater claim that fact is mere interpretation and language to some degree impotent. To accomplish this feat Ivanov availed himself of a concept in Nietzsche's early philosophy, that Nietzsche himself retracted almost immediately upon articulating it. In *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* the philosopher wrote: "Only insofar as the genius, during the act of artistic procreation, merges

Ivanov writes: "While in Athens, where I spent a year, I gave myself completely to the study of Dionysus. The focus of my studies was dictated by the urgent need to overcome Nietzsche in the sphere of religious consciousness."

¹⁸² Pamela Davidson remarks that because of the powerful legacy of the Renaissance, the Western world never conceived of antiquity from a religious standpoint, except occasionally negatively. But in Russia, which derived its religious views from Byzantium and which never had a Renaissance in the western sense of the word, it was not uncommon to see antiquity through the prism of religion. To conceive of antiquity through the prism of Christianity, but also to conceive of Christianity through the prism of antiquity is precisely what Ivanov began to do as he approached Rome. In this context, his references to "clarity" indicate the concept of a holistic vision: "clarity" represents insight into the union of contradictory elements.

Pamela Davidson, "Afiny i Ierusalim: Dve veshchi nesovmestnye? Znachenie idei Viach. Ivanova dlia sovremennoi Rossii," in K.Iu Lappo-Danilevskii and A.B. Shishkin (eds.), *Viacheslav Ivanov: issledovaniia i materialy* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Pushkinskogo Doma, 2010), 65-72; 65-66.

fully with that original artist of the world, does he know anything of the eternal essence of art; for in this condition he resembles, miraculously, that uncanny image of a fairy-tale which can turn its eyes around and look at itself; now he is at one and the same time subject and object, simultaneously poet, actor, and spectator.”¹⁸³ The artist, says Nietzsche, ecstatically unites with a greater “self,” thereby uniting the subject and object. This concept recalls an important aspect of Ivanov’s “clarity” as it was expressed in “Clarity,” wherein the subject who rises above his own subjectivity gains a selflessly or objectively “clear” vision beyond the individual, the partial and the perspectival.

Soon after writing *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche completely renounced the idea that the subject is capable of perceiving any sort of “essences.”¹⁸⁴ While Nietzschean concepts such as the uncanny, the fairy tale, and artistic procreation through ecstatic union with the other migrated into Ivanov’s writings, epistemological doubt did not. In the words of Michael Wachtel, Ivanov always “firmly believed in an objective truth that could be perceived by gifted artists. He condemned subjectivity in art, which he felt distorted this fundamental truth.”¹⁸⁵ Nietzsche’s notion that the subject overcomes itself and obtains some essential knowledge through union with “the original artist of the world”—a notion reminiscent of Ivanov’s intrinsic understanding of “clarity”—now became a method of historical enquiry into factual reality expressed in a poetic idiom.

Traveling from Paris to Rome in 1892, Ivanov symbolically traveled from decadence to Classicism and from scholar to poet of knowledge. On the way, the Pont du Gard, a Roman

¹⁸³ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, 33.

¹⁸⁴ Nietzsche speaks against his earlier views in such works as the 1874 essay “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life.” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 57-124.

¹⁸⁵ Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism*, 65.

aqueduct near Nîmes in Provence, made an impression strong enough to inspire several textual “approaches” that Ivanov began either during the journey or soon upon his arrival in Rome, but left unfinished.¹⁸⁶ These five fragments contain his initial efforts to reckon with Nietzsche on his own turf of classical history. In all five the speaker is a pilgrim, whose careful eye discerns in the outlines of the aqueduct the story of union between the Dionysian world and the Christian god. These drafts clearly reveal the mechanism whereby the artist-historian rises above the limits of his personal subjectivity to objective insight. This occurs through the narrator’s abandonment of the travelogue-like, descriptive, first-person narration in the first three segments for an “objective” and “insight”-oriented third-person voice in the last two.

The focal point of the Pont du Gard texts is the arch. Not only does it represent ancient Rome in all its might, it represents the traveler’s insight into the past and the mechanism of this insight: the path from sight to insight and an image of Ivanov’s clarity. The pilgrim notices the aqueduct from afar. Evoking the tradition of such travelogues as the *Italian Journey*, he writes:

From afar I espied the end goal of my promenade and twice rejoiced [because] because the sun already hung low and an early winter dusk might overtake my path. Where [in the distance] a fluvial valley signified two rows of hills to one side, they turned blue, bridged from one edge to the other [by six] about six large and magnificent arches. Peering about, the eye locates a long row of open-ended minor arches spanning the platform formed by lower archways. Appearing abruptly, this (distinct) (doubtless) impression (and part) of Rome, having indelibly marked (its) presence in an (heretofore enslaved) ecclesiastically subjugated country, triggers an agitation similar to what one experiences (suddenly hearing) in the moment when, unexpectedly, a distant, gaping roar (suddenly issues) heralds the presence of a lion. (F1)¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ N. V. Kotrelev and L.N. Ivanova, “Viacheslav Ivanov na Poroge Rima: 1892.” in Daniella Rizzi and A. Shishkin (eds.), *Archivio Italo-Russo III Vjacheslav Ivanov- Testi Inediti Viacheslav Ivanov*. (Salerno: Europa Orientalis, 2001), 7-25.

The essay contains excerpts from Viacheslav Ivanov’s drafts, now at the Pushkinskii Dom archive IRLI in St. Petersburg.

¹⁸⁷ The document contains 5 fragments in chronological order. I cite them in the text as F1-F5. The parenthetical expressions are textual variants crossed out or placed in parenthesis by the author

The traveler's subjective impressions and thoughts imbue this description of sublime encounter. He is a careful observer, focused on very act of beholding the object of his interest. The arch, a Roman architectural invention and an integral structural element of the aqueduct, especially invites comparison with the "gaping roar" of a lion as a symbol of the far-reaching might of the Roman Empire.

The fragment continues in a similarly ekphrastic manner, describing a Poussin painting, complete with "two flocks of sheep" that "slowly advanced up a rocky slope," and their accompanying "shepherds, draped picturesquely in their striped cloaks." The passage ends here, but the second and third fragments are variations on it, the third being the most complete in its detailed description of the pilgrim's departure at sunset. Variations of the verb "to see" (*zavidet'*, *uvidet'*, *vidia*, *vsmatrivaia*s', *obozret'*) and references to a "gaze" and to the "eye" occur frequently throughout the text. The object of this gaze, the aqueduct, is contemplated first from afar, then from a closer vantage point, from within, and finally once again from a distance. The fragments begin with "From afar I saw the end goal of my promenade" ["*Izdaleka zavidel ia tsel' moei progulki*,"] (F1, 2) and continue by emphasizing the effort of looking: "Peering about, the eye locates a long row of open-ended minor arches" ["*vsmatrivaia*s', *glaz otkryval skvoznoi riad malykh dug*"], "coming up to the river I saw, could survey every structure" ["*podoidia vplot' k reke ia uvidel, mog obozret' vse zdanie*"] (F2) as well as the phenomenal reality of the object: "Appearing abruptly, this distinct doubtless impression of Rome" ["*iavliaia*s' *vnezapno, eta iavstvennaia nesomnennaia pechat' Rima*..."] (F1). The plot of these passages concerns the relationship of the speaker's gaze to the aqueduct. At the same time, a sense of mystery and unseen presence accompanies the visions. Turning to examine the structure, the pilgrim beholds a golden sky through the arches:

The sun was setting behind the wreckage, the bright stones grew dark, and in the dark, and in the (dark?) carved vaults of the arches a heavenly gold shined (glinted) solemn(ly). The arches seemed to enclose a golden field like in Byzantine (churches) cathedrals; the imagination could willingly fill them with austere and (solemn?) images similar to mosaic countenances. (F3)

Viewing the sunset through the aqueduct's arches, the speaker is reminded of a Byzantine mosaic. Like a sacred Christian artwork at the intersection of nature and the Roman aqueduct, the entire scene is once again an ekphrastic description. In the pilgrim's imagination, figures in the arches return his gaze like Byzantine icons. The paragraph is extensive commentary to an image.

In addition to the diction that refers to vision and insists on the presence of what the speaker is beholding, there is also a diction of ambiguity and welcomed, evocative misperception, of un-clarity. In the opening paragraph of the first fragment alone the object is described by means of such words and phrases as “manifesting” “a distinct impression,” “indelibly marked presence,” apparent,” and “announces its presence” [iavlaias', iavstvennaia pechat', neizgladimo otmetivshego svoe prisutstvie, iavstvenno, vozveshchaet prisutstvie]. At the same time, throughout these first fragments Ivanov avails himself of the diction of imagination: “it seemed” [kazalos'], “the imagination could fill” [fantaziia mogla napolniat']. In the concluding paragraph of the third fragment the traveler's imagination again evokes images not present before his eyes:

The more [...] the gray twilight deepened, shot through with lunar rays, the more violently the mistral gusted, the brighter the road seemed, flat like a tablecloth... I often erred at the turn, thinking, what's this archway? The contours level off, but the imagination intensifies (word unclear). It seems legions travel this road. (F3)

The Romans appear as imagined legions whose imperial might reached Provence once upon a time.

The last two fragments differ markedly from the first three. I quote the fifth, and more complete, almost in its entirety:

Abruptly the contemporary traveler is uniquely amazed by the view of the presenting Roman arcade. No lineaments of beauty, no poetry of remembrance could quicken the pulse more forcefully: for in these stone vaults there exists a particular sense, a particular petrified life as of distant sphinxes bearing (Libyan desert) desert sands. How expressive is the clear simplicity of these lines! The tranquil and thus triumphant power of human self-esteem never expressed itself more appreciably than in the Roman arch. Solid, easily withstanding the weight of millennia, it stands stoutly on two legs and, describing half its environs (all leading to a conciliatory whole), all embracing a conciliatory, harmonious (all) whole, it resists completing its circular path and only more forcefully insists on its immovable stance. Its simplicity and essence seemingly avow that an involuntary creation of nature is before us; but to our minds its clear logic returns it to the domain of the human spirit. We reckon with its grandeur. We remember its creators, and the nearness of Roman genius bewilders us. We imagine [...] perceptive people [...] The builders of these arches (strong-willed and muscled) with broad square heads on powerful necks (seemingly of the race of powerful carnivorous beasts, and, strangely, this pretension pits its powers of corporeal spirit and will against us, as would the lion of the kingly tiger... At a remove of centuries we sense the demoniac charm we, barbarians, experienced when colliding with them. They were so forward-looking and reasoned with such clarity that we... almost don't hardly exceed our capacity, abundance, and breadth of understanding.

Unlike the first three fragments, this one is written neither in the first-person nor the meditative style of a travelogue. In its very first lines it disregards the visual in favor of insight: the traveler rejects the sensual, he is impressed not by the beauty of the structure, nor what this beauty brings to his mind. Yet the paragraph still comprises a set of images and commentary to them, moreover, the images function as illustrations of the author's concept.

As in "Clarity" insight is gained by rising above a partial, subjective perspective. This abstract speaker explicates the meaning of the ancient monument. In this way insight attains the status of a truth independent from the observer whose sharp eye discerns in the depth of time. By moving from observation to insight instead of to evocation, Ivanov insists on the presence of the invisible and knowledge of its nature. Indeed, diction related to normal human vision gives way to diction of clairvoyance and superior, supra-sensual vision. Instead of "I see," now "we see

into” [my prozrevaem]. Gone is the vocabulary of ambiguity, replaced by the vocabulary of knowledge. The speaker perceives the secret meaning concealed within the form. In the sharp contours of the aqueduct, he perceives the clarity and virility of its creators’ concept. The arch is a symbol of the type of reasoning that enabled Roman civilization to come into being and resolutely impress itself on history and in space. The “hawk-eyed” [zorkie] Romans have the power of foresight—the power to look into the future and build accordingly. As such, the arch is an expression of the “calm and thus victorious power of human self-affirmation” [spokoinaia i, sledovatel’no, pobedonosnaia sila chelovecheskogo samoutverzheniia]. A particular brand of rational clarity is embedded in the very foundation of civilization. But the symbolic weight the speaker attributes to the Roman arch surpasses rational foresight. Suggesting a circular movement, it is “all-embracing in its placatory, harmonious, all-encompassing unity” [vse obnimaiushchei v primiritel’nom, garmonicheskom (vse)edinstve]. The arch not only endures, it reconciles and harmonizes, symbolizing unity and synthesis.

While claiming insight into the meaning of the structure, the speaker does not specify what elements it brings into synthetic union. But the Pont du Gard texts provide substantial evidence that between 1891 and 1892 Ivanov was preoccupied with the idea of unifying civilization and the divine, the East and the West, paganism and Christianity, Christ and Dionysus. The arches of the Pont du Gard also represent one of Ivanov’s favorite narratives: a neophyte’s spiritual ascent toward revelation and descent back to his journey’s origin.¹⁸⁸ Finally, the “revelation” of the Roman aqueduct was Ivanov’s response to Nietzsche’s severing of Christianity from pagan antiquity. Indeed, the Romans in these fragments bear a conspicuous

¹⁸⁸ The arch as a symbol of ascent and descent was destined to enter Ivanov’s vocabulary. See, for example, I. Koretskaia, “Ivanovskaia metafora arki.” *Nad stranitsami russkoi poezii i prozy nachala veka* (Moscow: Radix, 1995), 155-162.

resemblance to Nietzsche's *übermensch*. The poet portrays them as a "powerful race" that is not quite human: work of art, perhaps sculptures with broad square heads atop powerful necks. They possess extraordinary willpower and physical strength, unafraid to kill or be killed (F5). In fragments 1 and 5 they are compared to great predatory animals: a tiger and a lion. In the second fragment the row of the aqueduct's arches announces the presence of Rome the way "a roar" announces the presence of a lion, the open space of the arch evoking his "gaping roar" [ziiaiushchee rykanie].

Ivanov thus depicts the creators of the Pont du Gard as a race of proto-historic, quasi-mythic creatures, superior to mere mortals, yet decidedly outside the divine. He envisioned them as fallen archaic deities at the very root of civilization. Powerful and charismatic, they are Promethean in their mission to civilize, Titanic in their raw, fearsome power. This association lends additional proof to several other images present in the text. In Greek mythology the Titans maul and devour the child-god Dionysus, who springs back to life from his heart, left unconsumed. This renders the image of a Byzantine mosaic (F2) logical in a way beyond any association of golden sky with golden mosaic.

For Ivanov, there are several immediate reasons why Christian imagery could be "inscribed" within antiquity. The aqueduct was constructed during the first millennium CE, possibly overlapping with the life and death of Christ and the birth of Christianity. Ivanov may have thought of Rome and Constantinople as the two main constituents of the Roman Empire. He may have visited only some of the Romanesque monuments of Provence, where Nîmes is located. But while these are possible sources of this image, Ivanov was more likely attracted by the provocative tension between a Roman ruin and a Byzantine mosaic rather than by the natural evolution of one civilization into another. The Roman arch as the terrifying lacuna of a

predator's maw invites association with a Byzantine dome insofar as Christ is a hypostasis of Dionysus, the resurrecting god of antiquity. Just as the Titans devoured Dionysus, so did the Romans consume the world of the Greeks, and Byzantium become a repository of the wisdom of antiquity and the pyx whence Christ returned to the world. For the pilgrim, the Roman arch showed Christianity to be a reiteration of the same divine principle first articulated in the ancient Dionysian mysteries. It thus symbolized profound unity where Nietzsche saw a profound rift.

In the decade that followed Ivanov's arrival in Rome, the arch as a symbol of synthetic union between historically antagonistic forces reappeared in his poems. Ivanov's first collection of verse, *Pilot Stars* was published in 1903, but contained poems written as early as the late 1880's. Two of these poems, most likely written in the 1890s, once again reflect on the encounter between history and the sacred, and Rome's role in this encounter. The poems, entitled "Coliseum" ["Kolizei"] and "In the Coliseum" ["V Kolizee"] enact Ivanov's ideas of the arch as part of a stage set. However, the founding of civilization and history in the Pont du Gard texts takes center stage while the future deity of Christian incarnation looks on, reversing the situation: now central is the crucifixion of Christ and the persecution of Christian martyrs as a historical event, while the deity in his Dionysian incarnation observes and participates from beyond the proscenium arch.

Coliseum

How heavy, the booming arch, and murky,
somber, deep!...
I enter: the moon silvers the rotting giant.
Like sunken eyes of the extinct, arcades
Glance anent. Everything sleeps. A vast
arena, empty...

And methinks: the ancient race of Nero and
Locust
Filled this tender dark...Myriads huddle.

Kolizei

Kak tiazhkii gulok svod, i mrak ugrom i
gust!...
Vkhozhu: luna srebit istlevshie gromady.
Kak vpadiny ochei potukhnuvshikh,
arkady
Gliadiat okrest. Vse spit. Prostor areny
pust...

I mnitsia: drevnii rod Neronov i Lokust
Napolnil chutkii mrak...Tesniatsia

Blindly—hawk-eyed, their glances blanket
me.
The silent splash, audible: the cry of mute
mouths...

What with ravenous tremor, as in days of
bloody orgies,
Perturbs their high tides under the pale
moon?
Where penetrates their gaze? What drives
their delight?

Whose is the shadow before me in the
bright arena?
Do I glance behind, seized with grief and
horror?
The cross, visible in the shadows, the
Crucified on it...¹⁸⁹

miriady.
Nezrimo—zorkie, na mne lezhat ikh
vzgliady.
Bezzvuchnyi slyshen plesk, i klik
bezglasnykh ust...

Chto zhadnym trepetom, kak v dni
krovavykh orgii,
Volnuet ikh priliv pod blednoiu lunoi?
Kuda vperen ikh vzor? Chto dvizhet ikh
vostorgi?...

Na svetlom poprishche ch'ia ten' peredo
mnoi?...
Vzgliau l' nazad, toskoi i uzhasom
ob'iatyi?...
Krest viden na teni, i na kreste—
Raspiaty...

Like the Pont du Gard texts, “Coliseum” describes the dark empty space of the building with its rows of circular arcades, the invisible presence of the “myriads” dead for centuries, and the arch as a threshold to the invisible from where the Dionysian primordial “other” gazes at the visitor.¹⁹⁰ This “other” is possibly the stars he views through the arches or the pagan spectators who once filled the stadium: bodies of history and its mysterious governing spirit.

The concept of a mysterious unity with a visible rift is once again central. A presumed site of mass executions of Christian martyrs, the Coliseum might symbolize a place of irreconcilable animosity between old and new religions. Instead, Ivanov envisions a profound connection between historical forces in violent conflict with one another. The empty stadium is a “bright arena” [*svetloe poprishche*], where the imagined Roman multitudes witness the spectacle of the Crucifixion. The macabre site of “bloody orgies” becomes a cosmic sacrificial altar, and the crossroads of two religions, two civilizations and two major historical periods. Poignantly, in

¹⁸⁹ Ivanov, *SS* 1:621.

¹⁹⁰ Kotrelev, “Viacheslav Ivanov na poroge Rima: 1892.” 12.

Papal Rome the Coliseum was turned into a place of prayer, and for a time a cross really did stand on its floor. Ivanov himself even refers to this fact in the commentaries to the poem, diligently supporting his idea with historical evidence.¹⁹¹ The mysterious connection between Roman civilization and the Christian message once symbolically “witnessed” at the Pont du Gard is thus reiterated at the Coliseum.

A Dionysian theater is once again the subject of “In the Coliseum,” only this time historical drama takes second place to the romantic drama between the irreconcilable elements of love and sin.¹⁹²

In the Coliseum

Great is their love, who love in sin and
fear
Byron

Day flamed out wet-coiled, sowing
Evening fire among the clouds.
Clouding over, it yawned around
The Coliseum’s immobile chaos.

Timeless eyes peeped through
Fate’s elemental dark... Toward night’s
threshold
We guided the day of torturous storms
The avaricious day—

Among the clusters whose fatal eternity
Was hallowed in sin and blood,—
Betraying the hopeless spirit
To love’s criminal thorns,—

V Kolizee

Great is their love, who love in sin and
fear
Byron

Den' vlazhnokudryi dosiial
Mezh tuch ogon' vechernii seia.
Vkrug pomrachalsia, vkrug ziial
Nedvizhnyi khaos Kolizeia.

Gliadeli iz stikhiinoi t'my
Sudeb bezvremennye ochi...
Den' bud' istomnykh k pragu nochi
Den' alchnyi provozhali my—

Mezh glyb, ch'ia vechnost' rokovaia
V grekhe sviatilas' i krovi,—
Dukh beznadezhnyi predavaia
Prestupnym terniiam liubvi, —

¹⁹¹ Ivanov, *SS* 1:860.

¹⁹² A. Shishkin mentions that the Coliseum witnessed an important conversation between Ivanov and his future wife L. Zinovieva-Annibal. Both he and Zinovieva-Annibal had to end their previous marriages in order to be together, which perhaps explains the biographical side of “loving in sin and fear.” A. Shishkin, “Viacheslav Ivanov i Italiia” in Daniella Rizzi and Andrei Shishkin (eds.), *Archivio Italo-Russo*, Dipartimento di Scienze Filologiche e Storiche (Trento: Labirinti, 1997). Ivanov compared the Coliseum to a holy sepulcher (Ivanov, *SS* 2:396).

Like two whirling leaves, resigned,
To the greedy bondage of liberty,
Until once again an easy sigh
Of inclemency will part them.¹⁹³

Stesnias', kak dva lista, chto mchit,
Bezvol'nykh, zhadnyi plen svobody,
Dokol' ikh slivshei nepogody
Vnov' legkii vzdokh ne razluchit...

The anachronistic paradox at the center of this poem is the discussion of Romantic love and the Dionysian spectacle that frames such love, in explicitly Christian terms. The space sets the stage for two lovers who find themselves at the Coliseum at sunset. Dusk as a liminal time, the arena as a liminal space and love as a liminal state invite an otherworldly presence permeating time, space and heart. Like Dante's Paolo and Francesca, the lovers enact the drama of love, sin and death. But, unlike Dante's, Ivanov's speaker indicates that this couple might be redeemed *through* their sin. The Coliseum as a site of martyrdom provides a stage where these sinful lovers can find redemption. The epigraph, excerpted from Byron's drama *Heaven and Earth*, also suggests that there is the possibility of synthesis rather than a stark dichotomy of sin and virtue.¹⁹⁴ Christianity inscribed within the greater context of the Dionysian cult suddenly yields such a possibility. Through the "timeless eyes of fate" there is the sense that the spectacle itself—the lovers, the theater and the sky visible through the arches—is but the phenomenal expression or incarnation of a transcendent deity.

In these texts the Roman arch embodies Ivanov's concept of "clarity" as he formulated it in his youth. As a structure, it represents the path whereby a visual experience becomes a visionary one and sight as it transforms into in-sight. First, the visionary approaches the object of his contemplation and in merging with it loses his subjectivity. The journey of the pilgrim in the

¹⁹³ Ivanov, *SS* 1:521.

¹⁹⁴ Byron's *Heaven and Earth* is written in the genre of a medieval mystery that pertains to the dramatic events leading up to the Great Flood. Ivanov chooses a quote that might reference this passage from *The First Epistle of John* 4:18: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." *King James Bible Online*. 1 John U.S. Congress. Nov. 2007. Web. 15 Dec. 2017.

Pont du Gard and from one draft of this text to the next demonstrates a progression from the personal to the impersonal. In the Coliseum poems, the speaker remains subjective, but the imagery suggests that he is taking part in a spectacle orchestrated by a greater consciousness. Unlike a mystical merging with a greater whole, this concerns a cognitive unity, or intellection. The arch emblemizes in-sight or the kind of vision that supersedes a subjective point of view, one that “sees through” to the reality beyond the visible. Second, the arch emblemizes the inextricability of the transcendent and the phenomenal. The transcendent is marked by a Byzantine gold mosaic or the black void framed by the arch; the phenomenal is the structure itself. Furthermore, the arch as a metonym of Rome is the event horizon of civilization, beyond whose limits lies the realm of the transcendent. The “lion’s gaping roar” [(“Pont du Gard,” F1-3) and the likewise “gaping” “immobile chaos of the Coliseum”(“In the Coliseum”) echo the same idea: myth eternally captures the relationship between the transcendent and the phenomenal. Once told, myth reemerges in history or even *as* history. Roman civilization both incorporates and devours Dionysus thus enabling its own resurrection. With respect to classical history, this structure embodies the creative potential of the ancient civilization. Standing on the threshold of a transcendent reality, themselves its incarnation, the mythic Romans ingeniously “inscribed” it as they laid the foundations of civilization. The arch is emblematic of the relationship between two forces. But which forces did Ivanov understand these to be?

Transcending Clarity: Ivanov’s Goethe between Rome and Athens

By the early 1890s Ivanov’s “clarity” was obviously an epistemological concept relating to vision as a metaphor for knowledge. “Clarity” in the Pont du Gard texts is an attribute of seeing into history and finding in its depths the “form” of its mystical engine. To understand how

Ivanov's thoughts developed with respect to "clarity" and history in the years following his arrival in Rome, it is necessary to fast-forward to the year 1912, when in the wake of the "crisis of Symbolism," and certainly with Kuzmin's "On Beautiful Clarity" in mind, Ivanov wrote an essay entitled "Goethe at the Turn of Two Centuries" ["Gete na rubezhe dvukh stoletii"]. In this essay on Goethe, Ivanov really expounded on his own epistemological method in relation to his craft and history. In this essay it is Greek, not Roman, antiquity that plays the main role, while Italy is mentioned in the context of the Renaissance and Goethe's voyage there. While the importance of Goethe to Ivanov cannot be underestimated, here he is secondary to "clarity" and its relationship to Italy and Greece.

In this essay Ivanov first mentions "clarity" in relation to Winckelmann, the great art historian who thought the art of the Greeks born of "white visions of shining marbles, as the shining dream of Homer's Olympus." Following Winckelmann, German neo-humanists formed an

almost religious community, united by their faith in the vivifying power of antiquity... and proving that in Europe everything new in art is born out of the combination of the Christian and the Hellenic ethos, and that this amalgamation continuously forms and transforms the ancestral substratum of the barbaric (Celtic-Germanic-Slavic) soul.¹⁹⁵

This community declares ancient Greece the place of shining Apollonian "clarity" to be the origin of civilization. At the same time, Ivanov asserts that Christianity as a retelling of the Dionysian myth is a source of great creative power.

Inspired by Winckelmann and seeking to overcome everything "formless, barbarian and Gothic," Goethe set out for Italy to study, but found his purpose fractured upon his arrival. He appeared at once to be interested in everything and nothing in particular. Here Ivanov begins to

¹⁹⁵ Ivanov, *SS* 4:109-157; 120.

outline Goethe's cognitive and creative methods: "clear contemplation in nature and art, [...] lively temperament, carelessly-joyful sensuality tempered by grace—become Goethe's slogans at this time, shared, he thought, by the marbles that smiled their Olympic smile at him." Rather than focusing narrowly, Goethe simply seeks "clear, objective knowledge, complete mastery over the subjective aspects of his soul." Furthermore,

Goethe condemned himself to objectivization [...] He demanded only one thing from himself and sought satisfaction from only one thing: clarity. He wanted his physical and spiritual eye to reflect nature clearly. It seemed to him that by studying a mineral he was studying himself. He created his own world by seeking to incorporate it within himself, emptying out the contents of his subjectivity so as to receive the whole world within his soul.¹⁹⁶

Once again, equating objective knowledge and "objectivization" of the self, this time Ivanov ascribes it to Goethe. Regardless of what the object is, it is the object of knowledge.

While in Italy, Goethe developed his version of classicism, based not only on his study of antiquity but also the Italian Renaissance. In this endeavor he was developing a style that would supersede the "formless, barbaric, Gothic" patrimony of his native land. It is no mere accident that while in Italy he completed his drama *Torquato Tasso*. The tormented poet favored by the Romantics, Tasso hardly embodies classical Apollonian clarity. Ivanov writes:

It is easy for him [Goethe], in his present spiritual lucidity, to subdue the anxiety of his hero, while the harmony and rhythm of the lines that surrounded him allow him to find the most perfect form imbued with transparent calm like the golden ethereal vistas on the landscapes of some old southern master colorists.¹⁹⁷

Clarity imbues the Goethe's work, lending it a perfect "Apollonian" form especially when madness and imbalance threaten his Olympian calm. Moreover:

In 'Tasso' Goethe tried to depict a genius's fated proclivity toward madness, which, he thought, developed from unspoken, irrational resistance to any figuration, which he, who

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 123.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 133.

sought salvation from Dionysus and all that is immanent within transcendent Apollonian form, sensed within himself.¹⁹⁸

A few lines earlier Ivanov writes that while in Italy Goethe turned away from Christianity, avoiding Christian religion and Christian aesthetics. Ivanov suggests that Goethe feared both Christ and Dionysus and was enthralled by the so-called “clear form” because it holds the immanent Dionysian chaos in check. Antiquity and the Italian Renaissance as perceived by Goethe and German neo-humanists are themselves such forms, restraining the barbarian chaos inherent in all things.

Discussing the second part of *Faust* in the conclusion of the essay, Ivanov returns to the idea of the transcendent form. He writes of Faust’s love for Helen, who represents antiquity as well as an “ideal form”:

This image, this form, is necessary: for, the immanent within the spirit does not seek to expand by means of an obscure union with the immanent in nature; no, it is in love with the transcendent, with what the spirit beholds as an objectively given form, and which it craves to possess, that is, to merge with its immanent content while retaining its transcendent form.¹⁹⁹

While this rather convoluted sentence references a line of philosophers including Plato, Kant, Schelling and Schopenhauer, the point itself is rather simple. Ivanov suggests that both “spirit” and “nature” contain immanent Dionysian forces and transcendent Apollonian forms, but only through the “other” can the subject obtain what is immanent. Only through Apollo can Dionysus obtain Dionysus. Only the object of love and desire—in Faust’s case, Helen, who also reminds him of Gretchen—can lead to the source of the “essential.” Only by locating this source can the self lose the limitations of subjectivity. And only through a beautiful ideal is this transformation possible. In Helen the Earth manifests the “eternal feminine” as an image of itself and as its

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 125.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 153.

essence. Her visible form is therefore a living image and living soul of a higher realm. The Apollonian form is a function of an invisible realm, whence both Apollo and Dionysus spring forth, and it is this realm that must be recognized or at the very least sought in the object of one's desire. In light of this, the "beautiful clarity" of the Homeric world, the lucidity of the golden vistas depicted by the Renaissance masters, the Roman arch filled with the golden sunset is an invitation to a game of hide and seek. The invisible speaks in the language of forms that express but do not disclose the invisible. This explains Ivanov's objection to Benois' juxtaposition of Dionysus and Apollo as spirit and body. According to Ivanov, one cannot exist without the other, and yet their interdependence is not symmetrical. The phenomenal world is only an invitation to the Dionysian invisible one.

Among other things, in this essay Ivanov once again describes an epistemology that applies to history in addition to science, art and metaphysics. Indeed, Goethe is not only a poet and scientist, he is a historian as well. But, writes Ivanov, unlike "our Pushkin" or his friend Schiller, Goethe was not a "historiographer." He studied the "chemistry" of history, not its "mechanism." He studied the living forces of its styles and its symbols. As a historian, Goethe initially followed Winckelmann, rejoicing in the somewhat hollow "clarity" of antiquity and the Renaissance. Their "Gothic," northern souls—predisposed as they were to formless melancholic states or, worse, to Dionysian chaotic madness—unconsciously found in clarity a necessary counterpart. But in their enthusiasm at finding such a counterpart, they overlooked the deeper, more obscure, meaning of antiquity. Goethe, too, depicted the Italian court in his *Torquato Tasso* as perhaps "too refined," too clear, and ignored the darker, more violent forces that persisted in the Renaissance. Like his immediate predecessors, he wanted to harness an aesthetic "clarity" lacking within the northern ethos. Only in the second part of *Faust* does he capture the

relationship between the Dionysian north and the Apollonian south. Presumably, it is here that Faust (and perhaps also Goethe himself) surpasses “beautiful clarity” in favor of the “höchsten Klarheit” – the total clarity of revelation.²⁰⁰ Ivanov believed that because Faust represented the European spirit and its evolution, his love for Helen and his final blindness symbolically surpass earthly vision and its remarkable use as an epistemological tool, finally to stand on the threshold of revelation. Having traveled to the furthest edge of clarity he crosses into invisible reality.

In “Goethe at the Turn of Two Centuries,” Goethe engages “clarity” in much the same way that Ivanov himself did in the years preceding his 1901-1902 trip to Greece. The major difference, of course, is that Ivanov’s “visions” of antiquity included the concept of Dionysus-Christ as early as 1892, when he arrived at the Pont du Gard. The essay implies that Goethe, too, was aware of this aspect of clarity (which apparently Winckelmann overlooked) but avoided it until his later years. Ivanov informs his reader that his own position is different. Characterizing Goethe’s writing of *Torquato Tasso* as a “victory” over the Dionysian, he provides his own insight into the nature of the Italian Renaissance:

There were two elements in the Renaissance: the element of fresh, barbarian, chaotic verse, peculiar not only to the European north, but perceptible also in the titanic spasms of the Italian Michelangelo; and the element of voluptuous southern aestheticism, which converted the barbarian into the native tsarevich Paris who abducted Helen of Troy, most beautiful of women, immortal, and perhaps only an illusory antique beauty.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Ivanov quotes this poem from *Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years* in his “Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism”:

Wie Natur im Vielgebilde
Einen Gott nur offenbart,
So im weiten Kunstgefülle
Webt ein Sinn der ewigen Art.
Dièses ist der Sinn der Wahrheit,
Die sich nur mit Schönem schmückt,
Und getrost der höchsten Klarheit
Hellsten Tags entgegenblickt.

²⁰¹ Ivanov, *SS* 4:130.

In Ivanov's opinion, the two elements that contributed most to the Renaissance ethos resemble the two elements of the Roman ethos, the difference being that now Michelangelo (not the ancient Romans) represents the Dionysian element instead of the ancient Romans while ancient Greek culture is an Apollonian vision. But while the golden Apollonian vistas depicted by Renaissance masters may have temporarily seduced Goethe, the essay's speaker knows the truth, and this knowledge sets him apart from his hero and his own earlier incarnations alike. Ivanov recognizes the clear image of joyful antiquity as a mirage. Making the error he attributed to Winckelmann and his followers, he "perceives" that Goethe in his later years likewise comes to this same conclusion. The writer of *Faust* blinds his protagonist to indicate that he had *seen through* not only the beautiful form of antiquity but all observable phenomena. Helen symbolizes the mirage of the world, even as she is a conduit to the invisible.

Ivanov's Goethe closely follows Ivanov's own progress along the path of "clarity," the important difference being that Ivanov approached Rome "knowing" of the Dionysian within the Roman civilization, embedded as it was in his first vision at Nîmes. But he and his hero share clarity as a method. Applied to history, it reveals how the secondary image of flawless Hellenistic and then Renaissance clarity is a construct: a projection or even a representation of this very method. Much like the Roman arch, Helen represents clarity as a vehicle of knowledge, embodying antiquity in its "clear" aspect. As a result, she is a "transcendent form": a conduit to the *realiora*, the greater invisible reality. The visible, therefore, corresponds only partly or not at all with what it represents.

Let us note that while Ivanov regards his own relationship to vision as similar to Goethe's, and while his tone at times seems to suggest a touch of superiority in his understanding of its role, in fact the two authors differ greatly on this subject. Ivanov wants to say that in *Faust*

Goethe finally overcomes the idea of sight as knowledge, and yet we know that vision remained of supreme importance for Goethe. For Ivanov, vision is something to overcome. In addition to the idea that Faust's Helen is an ideal representation of a concealed aspect of a cultural past and an embodiment of a metaphysical concept, he implies that all visible fabric is "transcendent form." This renders the entire visible universe an object of knowledge only when perceived as if derived from an invisible reality.

Dionysus against "Clarté"

The paradox of the unknown visible and the visible unknown informs Ivanov's work up until his late period. This has two important implications: one with respect to time, and the other with respect to images of space in his poetry. Ivanov who as a historian had to see into the "chemistry" of history—pushing past the visible facts into their secret "substance"—had to travel further than Rome. In 1901-1902 Ivanov traveled to Athens to study the archaic Dionysian cults. After this trip the visual aspect of his poetry became emblematic, and, to the reader, apparitional.

The trip to Athens was not a casual event for Ivanov. A decade of arduous scholarship preceded it, along with a tempestuous period in his personal life, the lack of a permanent home, and the death of an infant daughter in 1900, followed by a prolonged and difficult illness. In a letter to a friend, his wife Lydia Zinovieva-Annibal wrote that on the eve of their departure for Greece, Ivanov "broke down and wept loudly, then wept all night, refusing Greece, demanding to return home, wanting only renunciation in life. He fears for Vera's health..." Bogomolov comments that while Zinovieva-Annibal attributed Ivanov's heightened emotional state to the recent death of his daughter and his fears for the health of his adopted daughter Vera, the truth is

likely deeper.²⁰² His own contemporaneous letter to Grevs reveals the cause of his highly emotional state: “Of my internal state I will say only that my infancy (in turning toward the Hellenic antiquity and especially the history of religion) is difficult for me: that menacing distant vistas unfold before my eyes, that for now I discern ‘nothing but waves.’”²⁰³ His state of extreme spiritual and nervous agitation was due primarily to an anticipated transformation experience that of course exceeded the bounds of scholarly research. He stood on the threshold of initiation. Unlike the more meditative state described by the speaker of “Clarity” or the pilgrim of the Pont du Gard travelogue, this was to be a violent disintegration: a kind of Dionysian “death” of the self and resurrection to the “utmost” truth.²⁰⁴ Ivanov was setting off toward the vanishing point of Western civilization. To travel beyond the known was to travel to a place that set the conditions for all that *was* known while itself remaining elusive. Situated in the context of both history and metaphysics, this “unknown” destination necessarily blended fact and fiction. It also anticipated the invisible, mystical origin of the “transcendent forms” in Ivanov’s Goethe’s essay.

Little is known about Ivanov’s life in Greece, but by the time he emerged in 1902, Dionysus had strayed into every corner of his experience. The Apollo-Dionysus dichotomy effected a drastic change in his attitude toward the concept of clarity, which he now associates with Apollo and considers dangerous. In his 1904 essay “Nietzsche and Dionysus” for example he attributes Nietzsche’s mental illness to a surrender to Apollo. In the same paragraph he also quotes Pushkin, another important follower of Apollonian clarity:

²⁰² N. Bogomolov, “Viacheslav Ivanov mezhdru Rimom i Gretsiei.” *Antichnost’ i russkaia kul’tura serebriianogo veka* (Moscow: Iz-vo Fair, 2008), 57-64, 63.

²⁰³ V. Ivanov, *Istoriia i poeziia: perepiska I.M. Grevs i Viach. Ivanova*. 235.

²⁰⁴ L. Silard writes at length on Ivanov’s thorough knowledge of the orphic cults and on the concept of symbolic death and dismemberment as prerequisites for the symbolic resurrection of the initiate. Silard, “‘Orfei rasterzannyi’ i nasledie orfizma,” 77.

The scholar Nietzsche, “Nietzsche the philologist,” remains the seeker of “knowledge” and never ceases to delve into the creations of Greek thinkers and French moralists. He should have stuck with tragedy and music. But from his god’s wild paradise his other soul beckoned him to an alien, non-Dionysian world; not an orgiastic, pan-humanist soul, but a soul in love with the complete clarity of resplendent faces, in the proud incarnate perfection of privately conceived ideas. He’s captive to

The Delphic idol: a spry face
Angry, full of terrible pride,
Breathing with unearthly force.²⁰⁵

Ivanov quotes Pushkin’s poem “From Early Life I Remember School” [“V nachale zhizni shkolu pomniu ia”] with its salient references to Italian poetry and neo-classical sculpture. Ivanov uses the word *vsechelovek* [pan-human], famously used by Dostoevsky in his Pushkin speech with respect to the poet’s genius. Ivanov reverses expectations by situating both Nietzsche’s madness and Pushkin’s poetry within the sphere of the Apollo, and associating *vsechelovechestvo* [pan-humanism] with Dionysus. Apollo’s image leads Pushkin’s narrator astray and leads Nietzsche into madness. In another 1904 essay *On Verlaine and Huysmans*, he disparages the “notorious, ‘French’ (but actually only irresponsible), elegant clarity and simplicity of Anatole France, a crowd-pleaser, ergo a reactionary of the art of the word.”²⁰⁶ Here, Apollo isn’t mentioned once: only the irresponsibly elegant, clear, and simple writing of Anatole France. Evidently, Ivanov considers it offensively superficial to embrace “Apollo,” to write as if standing over the seething chaos of “Dionysian” chasms and not once look down. To concern oneself only with the visible universe that lends itself to knowledge and where the image and the word may indeed correspond in meaning is for Ivanov an abhorrent posture.

Ivanov’s diaries comment more personally and less harshly on this subject, without the intentional obfuscation and highfalutin rhetoric of his essays. For example on August 8, 1909 he notes that while listening to a Mozart quartet, “I once again experienced my Mozart mood, once

²⁰⁵ Ivanov, *SS* 1:715-726; 722.

²⁰⁶ Ivanov, *SS* 2:562-565.

again dreamed of clear joyful lyricism, of life's joyous visage, obscured in people's consciousness."²⁰⁷ This joyful visage is the same one that Ivanov will associate with Winckelmann's discoveries in Hellenic art. It is not a false image, but merely one aspect of existence. It is worth mentioning that Kuzmin was at the piano when this particular mood descended upon Ivanov, and that the 1909 diary entries reference "clarity" and Kuzmin together. In the entries dated August 1, 6 and 9, Ivanov associates Kuzmin with the clarity of humanism and Mozart as well as "clarity of form," and a "clear" state of mind; all positive associations. But the most revealing statement on this concept dates to Ivanov's conversation with Georgy Chulkov on August 11. Ivanov writes: "I spoke about the demands of time, about the law of egocentric self-assertion into history (about individualism as obviated by clear consciousness of man's lower ego)." This statement encapsulates Ivanov's position on "clarity"—not the irresponsible elegance of "French" style, but his own understanding of the term — as a marker of an egocentric epistemology and of history as the active field of this egocentric epistemology. He sees clarity as something he left behind in Athens. Even the title *Transparence* (1904), the poetry collection that followed *Pilot Stars*, suggests a *seeing through* the phenomenal world. Ivanov included the poem "Clarity" into this volume. Finally, in "The Precepts of Symbolism" (1910) he expresses contempt for the idea of "the word's adequacy, its sufficiency with respect to the demands of reason, the communicability of 'beautiful clarity' that could, if it wanted, always achieve transparency, if it didn't prefer to dissemble."²⁰⁸ Clear apprehension of the world is an invitation to look beyond the world.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 785.

²⁰⁸ Ivanov, *SS* 2:593. He writes of Tyutchev's treatment of the lyric word: "how far this is [...] from the XVIII century views [...] on the word's adequacy and sufficiency for the mind, and on the direct communicability of "beautiful clarity," which could always be transparent, if it did not choose to—dissemble!"

Conclusion: The Theater of the Self

Whatever the intellectual or spiritual nature of Ivanov's experience in Athens, he became convinced of a non-correspondence between the word or image and its meaning, and displaced meaning to the realm of the invisible. He arrived at this notion while journeying into the realm of the invisible in a different sense. He was, of course, in a specific place—Athens—with specific geography and history, but his research, informed as it was by religious aspirations, delved into the realm of the hypothetical. Spiritual experience tied to a hypothetical historical reality produced what Bely called “the union of mythical science with the scientific origin of the imagination.”²⁰⁹ Most problematic in the years following Ivanov's trip to Greece was his attempt to forge a “clear” and “objective” geography for the so-called “invisible” or “unknown” realm of clarity, which cannot be clear or objective. The dubious aspects of Ivanov's scholarship have been outlined in Philip Westbrook's book *Dionysus and Dionysian Tragedy* and especially in Nina Braginskaia's essay “Tragedy and Ritual in Viacheslav Ivanov.”²¹⁰ Without dismissing his work entirely, both scholars argue that Ivanov made valuable contributions to the study of the Dionysian myth, although Braginskaia demonstrates the extent of his factual manipulation and the rhetorical maneuvers whereby he achieved it.²¹¹

If, as Braginskaia points out, Ivanov filled the historical gaps in his scholarship with fictions, the opposite took place in his poetry: the unknown—the fictional—disappeared, as if dragged into the light of reality and consumed by knowledge. His landscapes are situated entirely

²⁰⁹ Quoted from Braginskaia, ““Tragediia i ritual,” 325.

²¹⁰ See Philip Westbrook's *Dionysus and Dionysian Tragedy* paints a vivid picture of Ivanov as a scholar, contextualizes his ideas, and offers a convincing critique, concluding that although Ivanov was a philologist, he should be viewed primarily as a religious philosopher who as a scholar was guided by his religious intuition (273). See also Braginskaia, ““Tragediia i ritual,” 294-329.

²¹¹ Braginskaia, ““Tragediia i ritual,” 302.

within the realm of the known, traversed everywhere by the human intellect. As a result, immediate experience in its own right is entirely absent. This mechanism is evident already in Ivanov's Pont du Gard texts, where the text persists as an ekphrastic exercise: the landscape is reminiscent of a French classical painting, the arch is a Byzantine mosaic. "Illuminating" the "unknown" or the "invisible" corner of the text gives the sense that Ivanov's textual visual sphere is mediated by a previous incarnation of the object he contemplates. The cultural and historic artifacts supplant the unknown rather than signify it. Both *Pilot Stars* and *Transparency* are filled with explicitly or implicitly ekphrastic texts, but even in the poems that are not the author creates a space for his knowledge.

This can be gleaned from the Coliseum poems, which appear to function as the model of Nietzsche's visionary artist who is like "that uncanny image of a fairytale which can turn its eyes around and look at itself" so as to be "at one and the same time subject and object, simultaneously poet, actor, and spectator." In these poems the pilgrim finds himself in the vortex of mysterious Dionysian activity. The Coliseum is a disquieting setting, shot through with the visions of what peers and asserts itself through the gaping arches, but is not actually there. Ivanov transforms the dark arches into empty sockets [vpadiny ochei potukhshikh] that watch him, the speaker. In one poem he imagines these arches are "fate's timeless eyes/ [that] watched from the spontaneous dark" [gliadeli iz stikhiinoi t'my/ sudeb bezvremennye ochi] and the multitudes of eyes that watch closely while being themselves invisible ("invisibly watchful" [nezrimo-zorkie]). The idea is that those who are present in spite of their absence administer the fate of the phenomenal—consuming it like the lion in the Pont du Gard texts. But ultimately, the Coliseum is a theater where the speaker plays all the parts. Moreover, while the arena represents a kind of Dionysian centrifuge, it is also an object of study like the Pont du Gard. The historical

precedent Ivanov's footnotes point out, grounds these poems in reality, with knowledge once again the protagonist of these texts. Thus Ivanov's "mark of silence" consistently refers the reader either to his own "knowledge" or to cultural precedents of knowledge, being, in the end, a mark of endless loquaciousness.

The reader of Ivanov's work will inevitably experience knowledge as tyranny. In absentia the unknown transforms the visual universe of his poems into clustered emblems of specific meaning. It is difficult to perceive Ivanov's ancient Romans, described as sculptural Nietzschean "supermen" complete with their "broad square heads on powerful necks" ["chetyrekhugolnymi shirokimi golovami na moguchikh vyiakh"] as anything but such an emblem, indicating what Ivanov "knows" of them (F4,5). It is this aspect of Ivanov's writing that Averintsev deemed his "clarity." The Pont du Gard texts offer a fascinating example of how visual ambiguity can enliven an image. In the third fragment, where the road is difficult to discern in the twilight, the speaker envisions the "legions" of Romans that once upon a time passed through this region. He observes: "The contours are smoothed away, and the imagination enhances [...] It seems that legions pass this way." This vivid image is poised on the threshold of unknowing and obscurity.

Ivanov's diary entry on his 8 August, 1909, conversation with Chulkov conveys the idea that "clarity" is a measure of an individual's conscious capacity to know, and that this consciousness realizes itself and its knowledge within the parameters of history. A brief comment in the Pont du Gard texts prefigures this idea with an illuminating twist. The speaker mentions that the aqueduct is beautiful enough to be a natural marvel, but that the clarity and practicality of its design sets it apart from nature (F5). "Clarity" is a specifically intellectual quality, pertaining to conscious reason, meaning that nature falls outside its domain. The first comment is, if not dismissive of clarity, then at least condescending: Ivanov has already

overcome the individual egocentric mind. The comment in one of the Pont du Gard fragments admires those who stood at the threshold of civilization, and purposefully divided it from nature. The Pont du Gard pilgrim was still a scholar of history when by 1909 Ivanov began to create a language that would if not halt history, then exist outside its flow. This emblematic vocabulary was meant to function as a tableau of fixed, unchanging knowledge beyond any specific event or subjective perspective.²¹² The crisp emblematic clarity of Ivanov's symbolism has a strange effect: as a receptacle of knowledge, it occupies a de-contextualized and idiosyncratic space that renders his knowledge obscure and his landscapes uninhabitable.

While Ivanov's attitude toward history changed with time, nature remained consistently outside the purview of history and thus the domain of "clarity." Indeed, all nature, including the human body, remains entirely outside the scope of Ivanov's interest. In the poet's writings from the 1890s to the 1910s, a genuine "other" reveals itself in this absence. While the poet earnestly attempted to overthrow the idea of correspondence between objects and their function or words and images and their meanings, he was never able to overcome the great mirage of the nineteenth-century scholarship: that of objective knowledge. Moreover, he attempted to recover and express such knowledge by means of poetry.

Could the role of clarity in poetry diverge from the one Ivanov ascribed it? Could art communicate knowledge by means radically different from Ivanov's vision? Could the body as a perceiving part of nature that resists abstraction conceive of clarity in ways that undermine the idea of objective knowledge? This type of clarity is not antithetical to obscurity and ambiguity but reliant on it. "Beauty" ["Krasota"], the opening poem of *Pilot Stars*, contains a fascinating

²¹² In "On the History of Russian Classicism," Pumpianskii observes that the emblem's function is "deeply a-historical." It preempts the event, understood as a basic "unit" of history, and attempts to solve the "problem" of the future by means of allegory. Pumpianskii, "K Istorii russkogo klassitsizma," 156.

reference to the possibility of such an alternate clarity. The speaker of the poem does not, however, acknowledge this possibility. He describes a mystical initiation in the form of an allegorical dialogue with Beauty set in the mountains of Umbria, Italy, the country of Ivanov's poetic "awakening." In a move that is typical of Ivanov, he situates his speaker in two locations at once: on the mountainous horizon, in the depth of the atmospheric perspective, and on the reader's plane: "I see you, divine depths, blued crystal of the Umbrian hills! Ah! There gods justified my dreams:/There it woke up a traveler." The rest of the poem describes the initiation through dialogue with a mysterious woman in the Umbrian mountains. She tells the speaker that "Whoever sees my face/sees forever" ["kto moi lik uzrel/tot navek prozrel"] receives the gift of a superior vision—which she proceeds to bestow on him. The speaker now has new vision *through* or *by means of* her: "Traveler, henceforth you'll see through me" ["Putnik, zret' otnyne budesh' mnoi"]. The poem's familiar vocabulary: "distances" ["dali"], "dream" ["son"], "in reality" ["v"iave"], especially those verbs relating to vision: "to see" ["zret"], "to behold" ["uzret"], "to see the light" ["prozret"], relate it in theme to "Clarity." The poem is an allegorical representation of Ivanov's "objective subject" who overcomes limited perspective with a superior "clear" or maybe even "transparent" vision. The speaker's gaze has traversed the landscape of the poem in every direction. Looking toward the blue mountains on the horizon he sees himself receiving insight on their slopes. Once again, he recognizes everything he sees and, not surprisingly, compares this zone of transformation to crystal.

The fascination of this poem pertains precisely to these blue mountains on the horizon, the place of the speaker's revelation. This makes intuitive sense. It is not by chance that in much later times Osip Mandelshtam would refer to Italy's "*iasneiushchie*" hills, albeit in Tuscany, not Umbria. Both Mandelshtam and Ivanov refer to a work of art rather than an actual landscape, yet

be it actual or representative, this distant space is the vaguest, the least clear—the least accessible to the intellect. It is for this reason that Ivanov claims this space as one for receiving knowledge. Could it be, however, that this luminous un-clarity is a necessary condition of poetic reason and that as such it must forever remain illusive? Mandelshtam, in any case, refrains from pursuing the vanishing point on the blue Tuscan horizon.

Chapter 3

The Clear Glass: Mikhail Kuzmin against St. Paul

“Поэзии живой и ясной...”

А. Пушкин

Clarity as a Ritual

On the cusp of the twentieth century, Mikhail Kuzmin (1872-1936), already an accomplished musician and aspiring writer, wears the dress of an Old Believer and pursues a strict religious way of life. Between 1904 and 1906 he will enter the salons of the World of Art, publish his novella *Wings*, and gain both fame and notoriety in literary circles. He will become a regular presence in the bohemian gatherings at Ivanov's Tower, and even live there for a period of time. He will scandalize some with his undisguised and unrepentant homosexuality, and charm many with his talent, wit, and general brilliance. But in 1901, still far from the literary arena, Kuzmin writes a long letter to a longtime friend, aristocrat, socialist and fellow homosexual Grigory Chicherin, in which he passionately defends his unprogressive, religious lifestyle. Chicherin will eventually become a revolutionary with connections to Lenin and Trotsky, and have a brilliant career as a Commissar for Foreign Affairs in the Soviet Communist Party. His letters are not dated, and some might be lost. It is therefore difficult to establish the specific letter that inspired Kuzmin's response, but the general sense of his argument may be gleaned from two letters quoted at length by Nikolai Bogomolov and John Malmstad. They are filled with historically-specific, dated vocabulary, and therefore are not always easy to understand, but it is clear that as he outlines a vision of imminent social and artistic transformation, he presents it in terms of binary oppositions, contrasting two types of creator: the one who lives for the present, and “*l'homme moderne*,” a visionary who creates for the future.

The former is a “native” [“urozhenets”] and authentic [“pochvennyi”], the latter is “alien” but “naturalized” [“naturalizovannyi”]. He categorizes Kuzmin as having previously been the “native,” and now the visionary “*homme moderne*.” Either he implies that in this context Kuzmin’s affiliation with the Old Believers is a reactionary gesture expressive of nostalgia for the status of a “native,” or directly attacks him for it in another letter.²¹³ In his response, the twenty-nine-year-old Kuzmin articulates a personal philosophy that will last him well beyond his days as an Old Believer. Since the letter too long to be quoted here in full, I reference only the concepts directly relevant to my topic. Kuzmin writes:

I have only the unchanged Church that has come down to our time, historically determined, determining the rituals and even everyday life [...]. Once something is known, of course, it can’t be un-known, but one’s attitude toward it changes, and often what is known is rejected as falsehood. [...] Innocence does not return, but it is possible to return to a state in which one may not be innocent, but penitent and free from sin. And besides, only physical chastity, virginity does not return, but isn’t Mary of Egypt more chaste than many virgins? [...] And later adhesions can be washed away; just as one can discover old frescoes beneath plaster, one can find an ancient nature beneath the most modern passions. [...] I say: “Glory to you, Lord!” I was an *homme moderne* and I became one because everyone alive is *moderne*. I am not making a broken shard whole, but cleaning the dirt from the old glass to make clear what has heretofore been obscure. [...] And belonging to the nineteenth century is only a temporary circumstance, nothing more. [...] You say “impossible” about what is, and you say that it’s fictitious. [...] Isn’t that sacrificing known reality to a fictitious and harmonious theory? [...] But the very harmony of the theory and its syllogisms leads one to suspect their incompatibility with reality, where everything is clear and confused, simple and contradictory, and can hardly be subject to systematization. And isn’t this literariness necessary? [...] ²¹⁴

Kuzmin rejects Chicherin’s linear vision of history, along with his complex system of binary definitions. He explains that the Old Believers appeal to him because their ancient church has resisted reform and remains unchanged [“neizmennaia”]. As he insists on the concept of his return to wholeness, he also emphasizes the fact that it is never truly lost, only obscured temporarily. A change in one’s relationship to the knowledge that constitutes the fall from grace

²¹³ Nikolai Bogomolov and John Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin: iskusstvo, zhizn’, epokha* (St. Petersburg: Vita Nova, 2007), 89-91.

²¹⁴ Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 92-95.

can overturn the fall, the subsequent expulsion from Eden, and emergence of historical time, and restore one to the state of innocence: “Once it’s been known—it is, of course, known, but the relationship to the known changes.”[“raz poznano—est’ poznano, konechno, no izmeniaetsia otnoshenie k poznannomu.”] Kuzmin conveys this concept polemicizing with St. Paul’s *Corinthians* 1:13: “Not to piece the shattered glass together again, but to clean the dirt off of it, so as to see its hitherto invisible transparency.”[“Ne razbityi kusok sdelaui tsel’nym, a so starogo stekla smoiu griaz’, chtoby ono bylo prozrachno, ne vidnoe do sei pory.”] In the Epistle Paul famously contrasts the obscurity of “now” with the direct grasp of the truth “then,” in the afterlife. He believes that the soul does not attain the clarity once squandered by Adam until after death.²¹⁵ Kuzmin associates Chicherin’s dogmatic approach with St. Paul’s, and suggests that there is a kind of vision that sees no distinction between “now” and “then,” enigma and “face to face,” as well as Chicherin’s “native” and “alien.” To attain it is “to clean the dirt from the old glass,” and to expose the original fresco, concealed beneath the layers of more recent paintings.

Although Kuzmin questions the temporal distinction between “now” to “then,” he appears to privilege the past by joining an obviously and emphatically anachronistic religious group. The Old Believers lived throughout the region where Kuzmin spent his childhood, in and around Saratov and further along the Volga. Beyond issues relating to personal origin there is also the question of the sect representing “original” Christianity, certainly in Russia. In a letter dating to 1898 Kuzmin describes his dislike of the Russian Orthodox Church specifically

²¹⁵ In the famous passage from *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Paul writes: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.” *King James Bible Online. The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. U.S. Congress. Nov. 2007. Web. 20 Aug. 2017. Toward the end of the passage Kuzmin references Paul directly: “But truth, as divine revelation, true faith and Orthodox life and practices are one and the same [...] Paul did not convert in order to serve science...” Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 95.

because of its “universality”: “Faith should be a small bark of salvation for the few [...] I am attracted to Christianity as it was only in the first centuries, not later, when it surged like the sea [...] In the beginning it was but a gathering of sects [...]”²¹⁶ Kuzmin claims to be attracted by the specific character and humane, personable scale of the group, associating individuality and uniqueness with a certain parochialism. His approach to the question of origin and the original as something located in the past is to realize it in the immediate present. In joining the Old Believers, he flouts time as a condition, but experiences it in its creative capacity. This action defines ritual, which according to Schamma Schahadat, “copies the original action (for example, creation), and repeats it over and over as though it were happening for the first time.” Schahadat continues: “Ritual removes the distinction between copy and original, between the creator and the usurper of creation. The participant of a ritual acts as though he is the creator, though in fact ... he repeats the action of another as though performing it for the first time ... Unlike a theater actor, the participant of a ritual strives to obliterate the distance between copy and original and attain the presence of the original within the copy.”²¹⁷ Motivated by genuine religious feeling, Kuzmin’s affiliation with the Old Believers was also a symbolic gesture that signified the abiding presence of the “original” Edenic moment. The religious sect served the function of a prototype—an original “text” that Kuzmin introduced into the present moment not only for its own sake, because he actually took part in religious ritual at this time, but in order to situate two distinctly different “eras”—“now” and “then”—next to each other. This action adds a significant aspect to the “ritual” as the purpose becomes not only to experience the original instance, but to remove time as a condition, and expose the original as inherent in every moment.

²¹⁶ Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 80.

²¹⁷ Schamma Schahadat, *Iskusstvo zhizni: zhizn’ kak predmet esteticheskogo otnosheniia v russkoi kul’ture XVI-XX vekov* (Moscow: NLO, 2017), 9.

Although Kuzmin's first significant works, *Wings* and the *Alexandrian Songs*, date to 1904-1905, while his first meeting with Viacheslav Ivanov occurs in 1906, it is worth noting that during this earlier period, his life bears some resemblance to the Symbolist *zhiznetvorchestvo*—a composite of the Russian words “life” or “zhizn',” and “creative work” or “tvorchestvo.” An important aspect of the Symbolist philosophy, this concept signified the effort to reform life through art as a spiritual practice. Since the Old Believers approached daily life as a kind of religious ritual, merging the religious with the aesthetic, it is possible to view Kuzmin's stay with them as a variant of *zhiznetvorchestvo*.²¹⁸ But the letter to Chicherin evidences some essential differences between the Symbolists' and his thought.

First, Kuzmin rejects a priori the universalist ambition and social drive of the Symbolists. Strictly personal reasons, rather than a lofty social mission, motivate his religious pursuit. Second, unlike the Symbolists, Kuzmin preferences space and spatial thinking. Rather than defer the “original” into the past, or project it into the future, he introduces the idea of “origin” and consequently the “original” into the present. Rather than conceptualize space in terms of time, he conceptualized time in terms of space, abolishing it as a condition and simply inhabiting an image of an uncorrupted age.²¹⁹ Aptly, in the letter to Chicherin, Kuzmin interprets the idea of return to Edenic innocence by means of a spatial metaphor. Clear glass or an original fresco upon a wall is a trope that represents the clarity that St. Paul refuses to grant the soul in this life. These images signify a kind of relationship to knowledge that restores the subject to Eden.

Ritual aestheticizes life for a religious purpose, yet maintains a strict distinction between itself and art as a worldly pursuit. Unlike the Symbolists, who tried to merge art and religion,

²¹⁸ Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism*, 144-145.

²¹⁹ I use the word “image” purposefully. Kuzmin's letter emphasizes the aesthetic appeal of the Old Believer lifestyle. The sect frowned upon art, but for him its “byt” clearly represented a kind of “total” art form, and an ancient one at that.

Kuzmin as a young man was conflicted about his need for both. In the same letter to Chicherin the poet expresses his discomfort with his inability to stop writing: “For now everything is as before. I am writing, I think it an evil, and superfluous, but I am writing [...]”²²⁰ During this period Kuzmin struggles not only writing, but also with “desires of the flesh,” and wishes to transcend them.²²¹

In a matter of just a few years, he will definitively change his mind about both. In 1913, presenting his lover, Iuri Iurkun, with a photo of himself as a young man in an Old Believer outfit, he writes: “How I was ten years ago, and how I do not intend to be again.”²²² But in fact he rearranges the variables of the same equation: the worldly desires to write and love absorb the qualities and functions of a ritual. A poem from a later cycle, “A Voyage in Italy” [“Puteshestvie v Italii”], exemplifies this idea.²²³ In “A Visit to Assisi” the poet describes a visit to this town with its famous Basilica of St. Francis. Kuzmin likely visited it in real life when traveling through Italy in 1897, while alone, though “A Voyage in Italy” describes a journey à deux. Although Franciscan poetry and religious philosophy were an early and important influence on his writing, the significance of the basilica with its famous cycle of frescoes dedicated to the life of St. Francis, is only one of the elements in the poem.²²⁴ Kuzmin deliberately structures it as a list of equally intimate details, so that in the first stanza the sheets on the bed in the hotel are emphasized just as much as the “shrine” [“sviatynia”] at the top of the hill: “The air is fresh after

²²⁰ Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 96.

²²¹ Ibid., 79.

²²² Ibid., 116.

According to his biography, Kuzmin shaves his beard and dons secular clothing in August of 1906. (Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 129). But in his 1905 diary Kuzmin mentions September 16th as the day it happened. M. Kuzmin, *Dnevnik 1905-1907*. (St. Petersburg: Iz-vo Ivana Limbakha, 2000), 43.

²²³ Kuzmin, “Poezdka v Assizi,” *SS* 2:56-57.

²²⁴ Shmakov, “Blok i Kuzmin,” 311-364; 352.

/ The exhausting bed sheets . . . / The joyful donkey will take us / To the high shrine.” A donkey, chirping birds, a conversation in the village, peeling paint on a fence are observed, named, and left behind. Such nonchalance is, of course, deceptive: the trip to the basilica ends when at the end of the day the couple returns to the room mentioned in the first stanza: “At home, sweet and happy / We lie down and turn off the light / Having completed our pious / And amorous rite.” [“Doma sladko i schastlivo/ Liazhem i potushim svet/ Vypolniv blagochestivyi/ I liubovnyi nash obet.”] The author deliberately situates the “pious rite,” or even “sacrament” [*obet*], of lovemaking in the same context as St. Francis’ basilica, the sun, the birds, etc.

One of the lines in the poem hints at the fact that it may be based on an illustration, a painting, or a memory that is as vivid as a two-dimensional image. When the narrator describes the vista of Assisi as both “shallow” and “deep” [“gorod melok i glubok”], he could refer to a vista that appears flat from afar, or, conversely, to an image that appears three-dimensional, but that is painted on a flat surface. The walls with the fresco depictions of the life of St. Francis in the basilica in Assisi are an example of the idea of surface as the substratum that lends everything an equally sacred significance. Kuzmin resorts to this image to convey that love and writing yield clarity as the kind of vision that recognizes every instant as a religious rite.

Once Kuzmin embraces his calling to be a writer and changes the garb of an Old Believer for secular dress, his writing becomes the ritual space, synonymous with clarity. Two early texts—the novella *Wings* and a short autobiography, ironically titled “Histoire édifiante de mes commencements”—reveal that the ritual transformation of a “copy” into an original in its own right is as much a formal device as it is a part of the plot. Since the novella contains many autobiographical facts, while the “Histoire” is obviously autobiographical, these texts accomplish more than stage the “ritual” within the plot and as a formal device. The autobiography implies

the author's participation in the ritual, while in the novella the protagonist's experience of attaining clarity presumably echoes the views of the author.²²⁵ An examination of both these texts reveals Kuzmin's approach to the problem of clarity.

In 1906 Viacheslav Ivanov asked Kuzmin to write an autobiography. Kuzmin agreed: in the summer of 1906 he wrote "Histoire édifiante de mes commencements" as an introduction to the diary he had begun in 1905.²²⁶ The emotionally restrained, almost detached tone of the autobiography and the swift pace with which the narrator recounts his story contrasts with the spirited, openly emotional tone of the letter to Chicherin. The narrative that claims to be a history of the narrator's beginnings is in fact an account of physical and psychological discomfort. It begins with the memory of the narrator's first serious illness, and proceeds to tell the story of incestuous advances from his older brother, his father's illness and death, the narrator's suicide attempt, an intense, and extremely significant romantic relationship, an important voyage together with his lover followed by his sudden and untimely death, and an ensuing profound psychological crisis. The final event in this unfinished narrative is the mother's sickness and death.

While the voice that recounts the autobiography is not indifferent to what appears to be a summary of events—it references emotions and some impressions left by certain memories—the narrator observes a certain distance from his younger self and his ordeals. For example, in a passage that describes a pivotal moment in the narrator's life, Kuzmin writes:

²²⁵ The autobiographical aspect of *Wings* was first noted by Chicherin, who studied with Kuzmin when the two were the age of Vanya Smurov, the protagonist of the novella. Chicherin and Kuzmin grew up in the same circles and knew many of the same people. Chicherin recognized their portraits in the novella (Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 159). Bogomolov and Malmstad write at length on the connections between the novella and the biography of its author in the first two chapters of their biography.

²²⁶ Kuzmin, *Dnevnik 1905-1907*, 267-273, 496.

In 1893, I met a man, with whom I fell very much in love and ties with whom promised to endure. He was about four years older and an officer in the cavalry <...> It was very hard to spend enough time with him, to conceal where we met, etc., but it was one of the happiest periods of my life, I wrote a lot of music, inspired by Massenet, Delib and Bizet. It was an enchanting time, especially because I found a new group of merry friends [...] My mother did not especially approve of my lifestyle; oddly, at this time I tried to commit suicide by poisoning. I do not understand what guided my actions, perhaps I hoped to be saved.²²⁷

Kuzmin provides a concise account of the suicide attempt and continues: “In the morning mother came. I stayed a while longer, was discharged but forbidden to play music for a few days, and left the conservatory. My love doubled; I confessed everything to mother...”²²⁸ The text almost flaunts its pseudo-superficiality, openly refusing to interpret what only the narrator could interpret: “I don’t know what motivated me... perhaps I hoped...” Kuzmin articulates his hesitance to indulge in exegesis, purposely exaggerating the text’s mirror-like, or “glass-like” nature. The paradoxical role of the concept of “surface,” fortuitously associated with the notion of superficiality in English as well as in Russian, comes to the fore.²²⁹ In the poet’s letter to Chicherin the surface—as glass or the wall upon which a fresco is painted—represents clarity as buried beneath layers of lesser things. According to this image, what is “surface” is also the most profound: Kuzmin’s ostensible resistance to interpretation, the faux superficiality that strikes an innocent reader who might expect “more” from his diaries, is his “clarity” in action.²³⁰ Immediately following the description of his suicide attempt Kuzmin elaborates on his first serious relationship with the man known only as “Count Georges.”

²²⁷ Kuzmin, *Dnevnik 1905-1907*, 270.

²²⁸ Kuzmin, *Dnevnik 1905-1907*, 271.

²²⁹ The OED defines “superficial” as “located on the surface, consisting of or measured in two dimensions, etc.” “superficial, adj. and n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2017. Web. 21 August 2017.

²³⁰ I refer to a specific encounter with a reader, sorely disappointed by Kuzmin’s diaries and their ostensible lack of substance.

In spring Count Georges and I went to Egypt. We traveled through Constantinople, Athens, Smyrna, Alexandria, Cairo, Memphis. It was a magical journey; *collage* for the first time, an enchanting and improbable vision. On the way home he had to go through Vienna to visit his aunt, while I returned alone. In Vienna my friend died from heart disease, and I tried to forget myself in strenuous studies.²³¹

It is possible to compare this record of the journey taken with Count Georges with a letter to Chicherin written by Kuzmin in 1895 during the trip. He writes from Egypt, “I don’t know how to describe to you Constantinople, Asia Minor, Greece, Alexandria, Cairo, the pyramids, the Nile, and Memphis. I am madly, absolutely intoxicated [...] I can’t write, so many impressions [...] Really, I can’t write.”²³² The sites seen, the company kept, the age—they were twenty-three and twenty-seven respectively—and the tragic ending of the voyage would have made this voyage a milestone for Kuzmin. The passage from the “Histoire” reveals the deliberate, almost mannered refusal to use text for the purpose of disclosing the self. No self-indulgence slips through, no one aspect of this narrative dominates: the voice does not prevail over the events, the events likewise do not overwhelm the voice, apparently speaking for themselves. The text appears as a list of events that have sped by without any effort of the narrator to hold on to one or another. Or rather, extending Kuzmin’s metaphor from the letter to Chicherin, the text presents itself as a surface over which these events glide.

The narration of the “Histoire” as a story of the narrator’s “beginnings” or “origins” does not explain the origin of the voice that narrates. The narrator and the narrative appear to a certain

²³¹ Kuzmin, *Dnevnik 1905-1907*, 271.

²³² From a letter to Chicherin, dated May 17, 1895. Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 53-54.

Lada Panova compares another traveler, A. Eliseev’s, record of his visit to Alexandria. Where Kuzmin is completely overwhelmed with impressions, Eliseev is disappointed by the city’s dearth of remaining monuments and repelled by a “fanatical” dervish. He came there seeking evidence of the ancient Greek civilization, whereas Kuzmin appreciated the syncretic, layered complexity of the contemporary city. Lada Panova, ““Aleksandriiskie pesni’ Mikhaila Kuzmina: genezis uspekha.” *Voprosy literatury* (November-December 2006): 226- 249, 242-3.

degree independent from each other: there is a distance between them. Adding to the question of the relationship between the narrator and his story is the issue of the text's veracity: Bogomolov and Malmstad observe that its very first fact is a falsehood. Kuzmin changes his date of birth, claiming to have been born in 1875, rather than in 1872.²³³ They also note that in some sections, especially pertaining to the years spent with the Old Believer community, the text appears to withhold information.²³⁴ It is impossible to know what, if anything, Kuzmin leaves out, but it is clear that purposeful misleading or fictionalizing of the self is not the author's goal. The "Histoire" itself describes the effects of duplicity on the protagonist, who attempts suicide following a lengthy period of concealment of his identity from his family. But writing a confessional documentary account of his life is likewise not the purpose of the narrative. As he writes a history that purposely reminds the reader of its flawed, subjective nature—that explicitly does not know what it should know, that refuses to plumb the protagonist's psychology, frivolously changes his date of birth by three years, and subtly avoids certain topics—he presents the text (with its narrator) and his freedom from it (as well as the narrator) at the same time. The author and his story seem ready to leave each other at every point of the narration, and in fact, the narrative is perhaps purposely left without a conclusion. The distance between the author, his narrator and his narrator's character, who in this case is his own younger self, is a crucial part of Kuzmin's narrative.

This distance signals a change in the narrator's relationship to knowledge, namely, a freedom from it. Since the origin of the voice that recounts the "Histoire" appears to be independent from the origin that it describes, the self-portrait that Kuzmin creates in the text obtains an independent existence—a life of its own. Rather than mimicry, this is mimesis as the

²³³ Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 17.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

instrument of difference. It is also clarity in action as a technique, and, one may speculate, something of a spiritual exercise—a ritual of changing one’s relationship to knowledge.

The Novella “Wings” as a Fictional Account of the Genesis of Clarity

In order to understand Kuzmin’s approach to his personal history in the autobiography but also in his diaries, one has to look to his fiction, namely, the novella *Wings*. In this text Kuzmin tells a different history, one that pertains to the origin of his persona as a writer. The short philosophical *Bildungsroman* was considered scandalous at the time of its publication because of the homosexual relationship between a teenage boy and an older man at the center of the story.²³⁵ *Wings’* unapologetic, celebratory approach to the topic of homosexual love caused critics to launch accusations of pornography against the author. Today it is difficult to understand why. Although there is a suggestive scene in a St. Petersburg bathhouse, the central relationship in the book is entirely platonic. Vanya Smurov, the protagonist of *Wings*, enters adulthood as he heals the divide between spirit and the body that plagued Kuzmin as a young man. The body represents the soul as it awakens through the erotic—in relationship with the other—to embody the artist’s voice. Whereas in the “Histoire” the body is represented as a constant source of discomfort, in the novella it is whole, young, and free of pain.

The novella appeared in print in 1906, in the November issue of the Symbolist publication *Scales*, though Kuzmin read it to friends already in 1905.²³⁶ Gennady Shmakov

²³⁵ John Malmstad provides a thorough analysis of the novel’s reception in his “Bathhouses, Hustlers, and a Sex Club: The Reception of Mikhail Kuzmin’s *Wings*.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9 1/ 2 (2000): 85-104. Zinaida Gippius was one of the most outspoken critics, as was Andrei Bely.

²³⁶ Shmakov, “Blok i Kuzmin,” 351.

Kuzmin read *Wings* to his friends in 1905. His journal entry from October 13, 1905, for example, contains the reference to Somov who is so delighted with the novel, that he stops acquaintances

describes it as “saturated” with philosophy of Plotinus, St. Francis of Assisi, Wilhelm Heinse and Johann Hamann.²³⁷ Bogomolov and Malmstad support this view, adding Goethe and Herder to the list of major influences.²³⁸ Like Shmakov, they do not believe *Wings* to be a mature work of fiction, and claim that Kuzmin’s philosophical principle of “clarity” does not emerge until the essay “On Beautiful Clarity” in 1910. Evgenii Bershtein adds the name of Walter Pater as influential in forming the classicizing philosophy of Leon Shtrup, Vanya’s love interest and central figure in the novella.²³⁹ Vladimir Markov considers *Wings* to be the key to Kuzmin’s writing. He believes it to be a “novel about the discovery of one’s ‘self’” [“roman ob obretnenii svoego ‘ia’”] and calls for a closer study of its Platonism and its “zapadnichestvo” pointing out that it is not by accident that Vanya Smurov discovers himself in Europe, “after the vulgarity of Petersburg and the constraints of Old Believer Rus.”²⁴⁰ Donald Gillis provides a careful analysis of the process whereby Vanya transforms into a Platonic lover, and the role that mirrors and reflections play in this transformation.²⁴¹ Finally, Klaus Harer argues persuasively that the novella is a philosophical discourse on love and that this discourse, rather than the peregrinations and love troubles of the protagonist, is its main plotline.²⁴²

on the street to tell them how much he loves it: “Somov is so impressed by my novella that he stops everyone on the street to say he had never read anything like it, and now a whole group of people (including Leonid Andreyev) wants a second reading.” Kuzmin, *Dnevnik 1905-1907*, 57.

²³⁷ Shmakov, “Blok i Kuzmin,” 352-354.

²³⁸ Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 131-140; 156-161.

²³⁹ Evgenii Bershtein, “An Englishman in the Russian Bathhouse” in Lada Panova with Sarah Pratt (ed.), *The Many Facets of Mikhail Kuzmin* (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2011), 75-87.

²⁴⁰ Vladimir Markov, *O svobode v poezii* (Izdatel'stvo Chernyshjova, St. Petersburg, 1994), 164-165.

²⁴¹ Donald C. Gillis, “The Platonic Theme in Kuzmin’s *Wings*.” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 22: 3 (Autumn 1978), 336-347.

²⁴² Klaus Harer, “‘Kryl’ia’ M.A. Kuzmina kak primer ‘prekrasnoi iasnosti’” in G. Morev (ed.), *Mikhail Kuzmin i russkaia kul'tura XX veka*. (Leningrad: Muzei Anny Akhmatovoi v Fontannom dome, 1990), 37-38.

Contrary to the opinions of Bogomolov and Malmstad, who suggest that *Wings* predates Kuzmin's philosophy of clarity, I argue that the novella not only addresses this philosophy, but also narrates its emergence. As the relationship between the two main characters, Vanya and Shtrup, unfolds along the lines of Plato's discourse on love in *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, and as the protagonist discovers his true self in the process, he transforms from a "copy" into an "original." Kuzmin's desire to "clean" St. Pauls' obscure glass yields the central image of the novella: a reflective or a translucent surface that aids in Vanya's transformation.

Vanya's journey toward clarity begins, appropriately, in a train, as he anxiously looks out the window, anticipating his arrival in St. Petersburg. The view is foggy and unsettling: "In the coach, which had emptied out somewhat before morning, it was growing lighter, and through the steamy window he could see the green of the grass, almost venomously bright, although it was late August [...]"²⁴³

The problem of origin is associated with vision at the outset: as he examines the uninspiring outskirts of the city through the glass, he recalls the recent death of his mother. This death appears to have severed him from the family tree altogether. His father is never mentioned, while his much older cousin, Nikolai Ivanovich, will leave him with a family of strangers and disappear from the text. As he arrives in St. Petersburg, the boy feels contradictory emotions of "disappointment and curiosity." He is generally uneasy, but apparently only half-aware of his isolation.

Another episode involving semi-obscured vision soon follows. At the St. Petersburg gymnasium for boys Vanya awaits Daniil Ivanovich, who teaches ancient Greek. As the boy peers into the teachers' lounge, separated from it by a glass wall, he is enchanted by its

²⁴³Kuzmin, "Kryl'ia," *PE* 1:71.

resemblance to an aquarium: “It was very smoky in the teachers' lounge, and glasses of weak tea gleamed slightly like amber in the half-dark room on the ground floor. It seemed to the people entering that figures were moving in an aquarium. The pouring rain outside the dull windows amplified that impression.”²⁴⁴ The images are in no need of clarification: their mystery is what begins to draw him out of his somnambulant state.²⁴⁵

Images of glass or other semi-clear barriers between the observer and the view recur throughout the text marking important moments of encounter with an enigma. Enchantment proves to be a state characterized by an attraction to but also a separation from an object. An important episode in the apartment of Leon Shtrup, the man destined to be Vanya's lover, sheds light on the meaning and role of the enigma in the narrative. Shtrup appears on the third page of the novella. He immediately attracts the protagonist's attention, mesmerizing him much in the same way as the view of St. Petersburg or the teachers' lounge. The older man quickly assumes the role of Vanya's instructor, and as their relationship progresses, the boy begins to attend

²⁴⁴ Kuzmin, *PE* 1:80-82.

²⁴⁵ Although Kuzmin's tour de force poem “The Trout Breaks the Ice” will not be discussed in this chapter, it stands to reason to point out the significant parallels between this work and the novella. As Boris Gasparov demonstrates, the poem features the theme of two brothers, twins, also lovers who belong to two distinctly opposite worlds, one of which is historical and “real,” while the other inhabits an otherworldly “green” land, associated with the Ultima Thule in Nordic folklore. A sheet of ice, but also love and desire of a woman, blue smoke, etc. represent an obstacle between them. This theme finds its equivalent in *Wings*, but the relationship between the boy and Shtrup is that of an adult and an ingénue, rather than twins. A series of glass and smoke obstacles also stand in Vanya's way, but unlike the brothers in “The Trout Breaks the Ice,” he eventually finds his way past them, symbolically “breaks” the ice and presumably continues on unscathed, with Shtrup as his companion. Although the text leaves open the possibility that symbolically they transition into an otherworldly realm, they do so together. Pr. Gasparov's thesis is that in the poem clarity emerges as an instance of collision of opposites, and momentary utmost dynamism. This concept is certainly relevant to my research into the topic, though on the structural, rather than the narrative level. I return to it later in this chapter. Boris Gasparov, “Eshche raz o prekrasnoi iasnosti: estetika M. Kuzmina v zerkale e'e simvolicheskogo voploshcheniia v poeme ‘Forel’ razbivaet led” in John Malmstad (ed.), *Studies in the Life and Works of Mixail Kuzmin, Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* (Vienna: Gesellschaft zur Förderung slawistischer Studien, 1989), 83-114.

gatherings at his apartment. An important scene takes place during one such gathering, when instead of joining the others upon entering, Vanya seeks solitude in Shtrup's study. He wants to enjoy a song played by a stranger on the piano in the living room. The song is one of Kuzmin's "Alexandrian Songs," published two years before the novella.

When Vanya entered Shtrup's apartment, he heard someone singing and playing the piano. He slipped quietly through the study to the left of the entrance hall, without entering the living room, and began to listen. An unknown man's voice sang:

Dusk above the warm sea,
Fires of lighthouses on the darkened sky,
The scent of verbena at the end of a feast,
A fresh morning after a long vigil,
A walk in the alleys of a spring garden,
Cries and laughter of bathing women,
Sacred peacocks in Juno's temple,
Vendors of violets, pomegranates, and lemons,
The doves are cooing, the sun is shining—
When will I see you, my hometown!

And the low chords of the piano, like thick fog, enveloped the voice's languid words. A conversation between two male voices interrupted the song, and Vanya entered the room. How he loved that viridescent, spacious room; [...] that bedroom with its sink, where a garland of dark red fauns danced against a bright green background; that dining room all in ruddy brass; those stories of Italy, Egypt, India; [...] those perplexing but fascinating discussions; that smile on the ugly face; that scent of *peau d'Espagne*, with a hint of decay; those slender, strong ringed fingers; those slippers on that extraordinarily plump pillow—how he loved all of this, not understanding, but uneasily enthralled.²⁴⁶

Everything in this scene spells enchantment and seduction. Consistent with his previous encounters with an enigma, the boy finds himself alone, green prevails among other colors, and his ability to see is obstructed by the "fog" of music. Shtrup's apartment and Alexandria in the poem form one fluid environment. The abundance of water imagery and color scheme of the scene emphasizes fluidity and a natatorial feel. The green of the garden and the peacock's tail becomes the green of the wallpaper in the apartment. The smell of verbena and violets echo the floral scent of "Peau d'Espagne." The syntax of the prose likewise mirrors the syntax of the

²⁴⁶ Kuzmin, *PE* 1:90-91.

song: the long catalogue of the things beloved by the poem's narrator extends into a catalogue of things, beloved by the protagonist. This list has an incantatory quality.²⁴⁷ It is potentially infinite, endlessly intimating but never presenting a greater whole.

Although the scene suggests a fluid relationship between time periods, places, languages, personas, it is also based on two instances of rupture: in the last line of the poem the narrator reveals that he is only remembering his native city, while the boy is physically separated and concealed from the party that includes the singer who might be his author and literal origin. Both the singer and the poem's narrator belong to the realm of the timeless, of which the drowned city is an emblem since it, too, is accessible only through detachment from one's environment. As the protagonist begins to approach this place beyond time, and as he is enchanted by its "exotic" otherness, he is in fact en route to self-recognition. But "Alexandria" represents an invitation, not attainment. In Kuzmin's diaries and letters, he emphasizes the syncretic nature of the city, evoking a plurality of cultural genealogies, and the liminality and fragility of their co-existence.²⁴⁸ According to the "Histoire" it is also a city he visited and was delighted by on his trip with "count Georges," and one of the last destinations they explored before the sudden death

²⁴⁷ Stanislav Shvabrin writes about the importance of catalogues in Kuzmin's poetry, emphasizing the connection between the catalog as an exemplar of encyclopedic knowledge, and memory. Stanislav Shvabrin, "'The Burden of Memory': Mikhail Kuzmin as Catalogue Poet" in Lada Panova and Sarah Pratt (eds.), *The Many Facets of Mikhail Kuzmin: A Miscellany* (Bloomington: Slavica, 2011), 3-25.

²⁴⁸ Kuzmin writes: "As I was walking home through a dark, narrow alley, I thought that I perceived the beauty and fascination of life most of all in the Renaissance and the eighteenth century, but the complex, uneasy moods evoked by smoky sunsets in large cities, the attachment to flesh to the point of tears, the sorrow of dead things, the readiness for privation, some kind of prophetic joy, the Bacchanalian, and mysticism, and sensuality—all of this appears to me either mingled with ancient cults—Rome, Alexandria—or in the near future of modern times. Despite Lorenzato and Cesare Borgia, the Italians of the Renaissance are, after all, rather staid, simple, and laconic. [...] Of course, this doesn't prevent me from loving Italy most of all." Kuzmin, *Dnevnik 1905-1907*, 49.

of the latter. In the novella, it represents not only an invitation to seek one's self in the unfamiliar, but, as befits an enchanted place, the danger of loss or entrapment.

Immediately following this scene is Shtrup's famous speech, in which he elaborates on the theme of origin already adumbrated in the "Alexandrian Song":

We are Hellenes, lovers of the beautiful, Bacchantes of the future life. As in the visions of Tannhäuser in Venus's grotto, as in the prophesies of Klinger and Thoma, there is an ancestral homeland filled with sunlight and freedom, with beautiful and bold people, and we, Argonauts, are going there, across the sea, through fog and darkness! And in the most unprecedented novelty we will recognize the most ancient roots, and in the most wondrous radiance we will sense our homeland!²⁴⁹

Shtrup represents himself and his friends as the eternal "Hellenes," and invites Vanya on a quest to reach their common land of origin. He describes them as everlastingly authentic, and as witnesses rather than subjects of history. Yet Shtrup's rhetoric is very much of the age, recalling some of the Symbolist writings of this period. In Bely's essay "Symbolism as World View" (1904), for example, the author writes about the desire of distance, perspective, and discovery, and appeals to the new Argonauts to set off on a quest to re-enchant the world. Shtrup's Argonauts also resemble the poet in Ivanov's "The Poet and the Masses [Poet i chern']" (1904), whose "inner freedom is the inner inevitability of a return to and union with native elements." Ivanov's poet, very much like Shtrup, "invents the new and obtains the ancient" ["izobretaet novoe i obretaet drevnee"].²⁵⁰ Despite appearances, however, Shtrup's position differs significantly from the Symbolists', first and foremost because for him the ancient ideal is not an abstract notion, but one that emerges in and by means of love. It exists only in interaction, as a combination of the spiritual and the erotic experience. Shtrup articulates this concept early in the

²⁴⁹ Kuzmin, *PE* 1:92.

²⁵⁰ Ivanov, *SS*: 709-714, 713.

novella, when Vanya complains to him of the difficulty of Homer's Greek, and expresses a desire to read the text in translation. The terms in which Shtrup rejects this idea are telling:

In lieu of a flesh-and-blood human being, laughing or gloomy, whom you can love, kiss, and hate, whose blood you can see flowing through his veins, and the natural grace of a naked body—to have a soulless doll, often made by a craftsman—that is a translation.²⁵¹

At the end of their conversation he looks at Vanya “with infinite regret,” but encourages him, telling him that he has what it takes to become “a truly new man.”²⁵² As he speaks of Homer's text in the original ancient Greek, he compares it to the body of the beloved. The description is deliberately not “Classical”—not idealized, cold and remote, but close, familiar, inimitable. Shtrup's “original” is so alive, it is easy to forget that he is talking about Homer. Indeed, the text proceeds to reverse his metaphor. For Vanya to embody the original is to welcome love.

Shtrup's emphasis on Homer's Greek as the original, or his exalted invitation to the Cythera should not be confused with the Symbolist veneration of the original as authority, or an objective truth claim. *Wings* undermines the possibility of such a reading, when Daniil Ivanovich, the “Greek,” draws his pupil's attention to the fact that in history perception is contingent on the point of view:

It's funny how much we see what we want to see and understand what we are seeking. The Romans and the Romance peoples of the seventeenth century saw only the three unities in Greek tragedies; the eighteenth century—grand declamations and liberating ideas; the Romantics, feats of great heroism; and our age—the sharp outline of the primitive state and Klinger-esque illuminated expanses...²⁵³

For Daniil Ivanovich, Shtrup's “clairvoyant” painters Klinger and Thoma see *merely* [“tol'ko”] what their historically defined position allows them to see, or what they themselves need for their artistic purposes. The presence of Klinger's name in the Greek's discourse signals that Shtrup is

²⁵¹ Kuzmin *PE* 1:78.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 86.

not immune to partiality, and that, in spite of his claims, he is a man of his time. The text precludes the notion of origin having the authority of an objective truth claim. It is apt to recall Kuzmin's personal views on the subject of the original. While still in his religious phase, he described his impressions of prayer in Greek versus in Russian to Chicherin: "And I remember how I read all of the most beautiful prayers in the Greek original: what pitiful pedantic doggerel in Sapphic and Anacreontic meters! Of course, this does not make them less sacred, but poetically their translations are by far superior, and they are the only versions possible as prayers for church recital (in Russia)."²⁵⁴ Kuzmin can be quite irreverent of the prototype, even when it is Greek.

Positing the Classical "original" as loveable and personal, rather than cold and remote Kuzmin in *Wings* polemicizes with a specific literary tradition that represents the classics as irrelevant and obsolete. The text takes issue with Dostoevsky and Chekhov especially. Vanya Smurov shares his last name with a young boy from the "Boys" chapter of Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. In his conversation with Shtrup, he echoes the sentiment of Kolya Krasotkin, another boy in the group that includes Smurov, who claims that the classics are obsolete and dull, and that translations into Russian should be introduced in school instead of the originals. Shtrup and Daniil Ivanovich will disabuse him of such views. The Greek's enlightened attitude conspicuously contrasts with the stereotypical teacher of classical languages derided by Chekhov in "Man in a Case."²⁵⁵ Vanya's progress toward authenticity is marked by a separation

²⁵⁴ Quoted from Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 102. Unlike the Symbolists, Kuzmin never prioritized the historical original as more "authentic."

²⁵⁵ Aleksandr Timofeev's essay "'Kryl'ia.' Mikhail Kuzmin v polemike s Dostoevskim i Chekhovym" analyzes the passage where Shtrup and Vanya discuss translations and original in the context of Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, and examines the character of Daniil Ivanovich as an anti-Chekhovian classicist.

not only from his personal history, but his literary genealogy as well. He represents a departure from the Russian realist tradition.

The novella also rejects the “original” as an unequivocal absolute, an authority by virtue of association with or representation of the “origin.” In the previously discussed scenes, this notion refers to Alexandria and Homer, respectively. Elsewhere in the text it also references Hadrian’s Rome and Renaissance art. The concept of the original figures in the text in the form of its numerous interpretations, rather than a static absolute. In accordance with Shtrup’s speech, as well as the “Alexandrian Song” performed in his salon, it is beyond reach, until rendered concrete in love or in writing.

Vanya’s transformation into the “original” occurs as he learns a specific lesson, offered to him by several different teachers as the narrative unfolds. It concerns the relationship between body and spirit, and therefore the problem of love. Daniil Ivanovich is the first to articulate the notion that in love the object is less important than the love. He discusses the love of Patroclus and Achilles in Homer’s *Iliad*, and explains to Vanya that even though the interpretation of their relationship as romantic emerged during the Italian Renaissance, it is not necessarily incorrect. He then makes the following statement: “[O]nly a cynical attitude to love makes it debauchery. Am I acting morally or immorally when I sneeze, dust the table, pet a kitten? And yet these same acts can be criminal: if, for instance, I sneeze in order to alert a murderer of the best time to kill [...]”.²⁵⁶ The object means little in and of itself. The relationship to it, however, is extremely significant.

The next person to reiterate this idea is an Italian composer, Ugo Orsini whom Vanya encounters in Italy. After he and the boy watch the opera *Tristan and Isolde*, Vanya compares its

²⁵⁶ M. Kuzmin, *Proza 1906-1912 gg.*, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Agraf, 1999), 87.

plot to an erotically charged, but grotesquely comical scene witnessed earlier that day at an inn. Vanya proposes that since the same physical act appears to be the culmination of all kinds of love, from elevated to comedic, no rhetoric can rescue it from its base nature. Ugo corrects him: “Of course, the act itself and its bare essence are not important; what is important is one’s attitude; even the most shocking act, the most unthinkable situation can be justified and purified by one’s attitude toward it.”²⁵⁷ Orsini does more than reject Vanya's reductionist view on love. In effect, he rejects the idea that an objective fact may prevail over one’s subjective power to interpret.

Finally, Vanya’s Florentine host, Canon Mori, offers him the same advice. This time they discuss the Emperor Tiberius’ depravity and compare them with Emperor Hadrian’s love for Antinous:

What is important in every act is one’s attitude, its purpose, and its motivation; actions themselves are merely mechanical movements of our body, incapable of offending anyone, least of all the Lord.²⁵⁸

Ironically, a Roman Catholic priest speaks these words.²⁵⁹ Mori has the authority of the Church on his side, though he clearly also does not follow its decrees. Notably, each of the three teachers speaks on behalf of a specific historical period: the Greek for Homer and ancient Greek history, Orsini for the fin de siècle decadents in the spirit of D’Annunzio, and Mori for Roman antiquity, the Florentine Renaissance and Baroque respectively. Each also introduces Vanya to a different

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 138

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 143.

²⁵⁹ A Canon Mori really did host Kuzmin in Florence. His life-affirming disposition, erudite knowledge of Roman and Florentine history and genuine religiosity in a harmonious union with a rather heathen way of life made a powerful impression on the poet. Mori appears in his “Histoire,” and in his letters from Italy. He lodges Vanya at the same address in Florence as where he actually stayed with him. (Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 41.)

language: Daniil Ivanovich to ancient Greek, Orsini to music, especially Wagner, and Mori to Italian.²⁶⁰

This lesson conjoins the discourse on love and the discourse on language, for it reveals that the “original” is not an object at all, but a relationship to the object. But while Vanya’s teachers emphasize this point, they do not specify what the relationship should be. In the course of the novella Vanya also witnesses two instances where it goes terribly awry. Poignantly, in each instance allusions to the underwater realm and the color green imply the presence of “Alexandria”—a locus as enticing as it is dangerous.

In the second part of *Wings* Vanya finds himself in an Old Believer town on the Volga. One day after bathing in the river he beholds a disturbing scene: villagers pull ashore the body of a drowned boy his age, who is also named Vanya. He has committed suicide because while extremely pious and even aspiring to be a monk, he was unable to resist the advances of a woman, who deliberately set out to seduce him. The text’s misogyny is not subtle: desiring a woman renders the conflict between spirit and body especially acute, and leads to this character’s demise. Vanya observes with horror and repulsion the corpse without any distinct, recognizable features.²⁶¹ It embodies disembodiment and indistinctness as the opposite of clarity.

The concluding part of the novella, set in Italy, contains a story of a metaphorically “drowned” man. In Florence, Vanya encounters a Russian painter, who falls prey to an Italian femme fatale, Veronica Cibo. Cibo has “dissolute mermaid eyes on a pale face” [“razvratnye

²⁶⁰ Detailed analysis of the role of Wagner and the Celtic legends as well as use of veils and screens in Kuzmin’s “Trout Breaks the Ice” in B. Gasparov’s essay “Eshche raz o prekrasnoi iasnosti.” See also Gennadii Shmakov, “Mikhail Kuzmin i Rikhard Vagner” in John Malmstad (ed.), *Studies in the Life and Works of Mixail Kuzmin. Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* (Vienna: Gesellschaft zur Förderung slawistischer Studien, 1989), 31-45. Evidently, these themes were of interest to Kuzmin already at the beginning of his literary career.

²⁶¹ Kuzmin, *PE* 1:121-122.

rusaloch'i glaza na blednom litse"] and observes her surroundings from behind a green veil.²⁶²

When she lifts it, we learn that her gaze has a quality of eerie immobility and appears blind:

"Cibo stared fixedly at Blonskaya as though she didn't see her, as though she were blind."²⁶³

Ugo Orsini mentions also that her speech is vulgar and inarticulate. He and Vanya encounter the painter and Cibo at the train station, where they are getting ready to depart for an unspecified destination. Vanya comments that the encounter feels like the painter's funeral. The painter's dilemma is similar to that of the drowned Old Believer. He appears to have the Madonna-Whore syndrome. He believes he must choose desire over love, and departs with Cibo so as to not contaminate the purity of the angelic Anna Blonskaia, the woman he actually loves.²⁶⁴ Cibo's name translated from Italian means "food," and references the body and its base needs.²⁶⁵

Departing with her, the painter exchanges clarity for blindness.

Vanya begins to accept and understand love as he develops a proper relationship to his own image as seen in a reflection. In the beginning of the novella he does not yet have one. As he looks at his reflection in the mirror, the narrator comments, "He neither liked nor disliked this tall, slender boy with thin eyebrows wearing a black smock."²⁶⁶ Little by little, this begins to change. On the Volga he observes his image reflected in the river:

[Vanya] looked at the reflection, distorted by the dispersing circles in the water, of his tall, limber body with slim thighs and long, graceful legs, tanned from sunbathing; his blond curls flowing down over the slender neck; and his big eyes in a round, lean face; and, smiling to himself, he entered the cold water.²⁶⁷

²⁶² Cibo represents the femme fatale trope favored in the World of Art circle. Neil Granoien, "Wings and 'The World of Art'." *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 11 (1975): 393-405. On the femme fatale in the World of Art, see 401-2.

²⁶³ Kuzmin, *PE* 1:133, 138-139. Cibo's mermaid eyes are mentioned twice, on 133 and 138.

²⁶⁴ "Russian fantasies [*Russkie fantazii*]," contemptuously comments Orsini. Kuzmin, *PE* 1:130.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

²⁶⁶ Kuzmin, *Proza 1906-1912* 1, 73.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

Soon after this scene, the same river yields the drowned boy's body. Later that evening, very upset, Vanya examines his reflection in the mirror, and suddenly repeats Shtrup's words of admiration for the male body: "And there are ligaments, muscles in the human body that cannot be seen without a tremor! Everything will pass; everything will perish! I myself know nothing, have seen nothing, but I want to, I want to...I am not unfeeling, not a stone, and now I know my own beauty!"²⁶⁸ Origination is a mimetic process: only as Vanya sees himself through Shtrup's eyes does he emerge as the "original" rather than the "translation." Shtrup, himself an embodiment of the "original" that the boy seeks, is Vanya's "prototype," and the catalyst for his transformation into an authentic being. It is apt to recall Daniil Ivanovich's words about the prototype as always interpreted in terms of the needs and capabilities of the interpreter. Elsewhere, he subtly applies this concept to the relationship between the boy and Shtrup. He outlines the itinerary of the journey he plans to undertake in order to take part in archeological digs, where else, but in "Athens, Alexandria, Rome," as well as Pompeii. He plans to follow Shtrup's earlier call, but as a scholar rather than an aesthete. Before the conversation with Vanya is finished, he makes a connection between his journey and Vanya's: "I [...] am showing you what you are lacking—the kind of life that for you is embodied in Shtrup."²⁶⁹ For Vanya, Shtrup is the transformative destination: his "prototype."

Since Daniil Ivanovich connects archaeology and love, and Shtrup's description of Homer's Greek describes ancient text, but insinuates love, Vanya's transformation not only marks a milestone in his development, but also provides commentary on writing. His attainment of his individual self parallels the process of stylization, wherein the text responds to the original work by both assimilating it, and maintaining a distance from it. It gives the original a new life

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 123.

²⁶⁹ Kuzmin, *PE* 1:119.

by imitating it, but also by relating to it as an entity that is extrinsic to the text. In the heart of “authenticity” mimesis replaces genealogy.

Kuzmin’s novella delivers his protagonist from a state of being constricted by personal and historical circumstance, to a state of freedom within the same context. Freedom from authority, especially that of origin, is the somewhat counterintuitive significance of “Classical ideal” in *Wings*. The text provides another example of this idea, bringing together the protagonist, his author, and the “ideal” prototype. The three meet in Florence, where Vanya is hosted by the aforementioned canon Mori.

“Here is your room!” announced Mori, leading Vanya into a large, square, light bluish room [...] a simple table, a shelf of edifying books, and, on the dresser under a glass lampshade, a painted wax doll of St. Luigi Gonzaga dressed in a sewn fabric *enfant de chœur* outfit made the room look like a monk’s cell.²⁷⁰

The wax doll of St. Luigi, considered a patron saint of Christian youth, is especially important in this description. St. Luigi is Aloysius Gonzaga, a sixteenth-century aristocrat who died a young man while taking care of the sick during a plague epidemic. He is associated with medicine, and therefore the body.²⁷¹ Kuzmin mentions him in the “Histoire”: “I wandered around visiting churches, his [Mori’s] acquaintances, his mistress [...], I read vitas of holy martyrs, especially Luigi Gonzago (*sic*), and I was ready to convert and become a monk.” [“Ia brodil po tserkvam, po ego [Mori] znakomym, k ego liubovnitse [...], chital zhitaia sviatykh velikomuchennikov, osobenno Luigi Gonzago (*sic*), i byl gotov sdelat’sia dukhovnym i monakhom.”]²⁷² Kuzmin also wrote of him in his 1897 letters from Florence:

²⁷⁰ Kuzmin, *Proza 1906-1912 gg.* 1, 131.

²⁷¹ “Saint Aloysius Gonzaga.” *Encyclopædia Britannica. Britannica Academic*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016. Web. 31 May. 2016.

<<http://academic.eb.com/EBchecked/topic/17000/Saint-Aloysius-Gonzaga>.>

²⁷² Kuzmin, *Dnevnik 1905-1907*, 271.

They often call me St. Luigi here, as they see in me a striking resemblance to portraits and icons of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. I didn't see his portrait, but I read the vita of this enchanting Jesuit, who died in his twenty-fifth year. Immersed in his life and making mystical inferences from the trivial facts that he looked like me and died in his twenty-fifth year...I asked whether I would be capable of imitating and continuing His life. Mori said he felt certain that I could..²⁷³

In *Wings* the episode with the doll of St. Luigi differs from the previous interpretations of the copy-original relationship in that while the doll is obviously an image, its "original" is a text. While Kuzmin resembles "portraits and images" of St. Luigi, he has never seen them. The doll embodies identity in metamorphosis from word to image, in other words, it embodies a metaphor. Mimesis as a kind of metaphoric relationship governs the relationship between the prototype as the saint's written hagiography, the author as the saint's "copy," and the protagonist as another double—and another text—of both the author and the saint. None of the three can claim authority over another in this relationship. Toy-like and separated from Vanya by its bell jar, the doll allows the protagonist to retain his independence, much as he did while listening to one of the "Alexandrian Songs" in Shtrup's living room.

Although the relationship between these characters is not hierarchical, the doll has symbolic agency. Presumably a passive object among others strewn about Mori's shelves, it is actually a potent agent of transformation. The substance out of which it is made betrays its magical power. Associated with bees and the sun, Apollo, Dionysus, Persephone, and the Eleusinian mysteries, wax represents an amalgamation of the spiritual and the corporeal. As Descartes famously observed in the second of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, its only permanent properties are extension, changeability and movability. Its very identity is transformation. While arrested and still behind the glass barrier, the doll guides the boy in the

²⁷³ Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 74.

process of metamorphosis, just as the saint presumably looked over the author while he was in Florence. His function is not to exercise control, but to guide the protagonist to freedom.

In the concluding sentences of the novella Vanya gets up after a sleepless night, having made the decision to accompany Shtrup on his journey to the Apulean port city of Bari. The reader can safely assume that the sea route will take them from there to Greece and on to North Africa.²⁷⁴ With the doll of St. Luigi looking over the scene, Vanya stands in his bedroom in Florence, writes a brief note to Shtrup, and opens the window onto the sunlit street:

He arose after a sleepless night [...] and, after washing and dressing slowly and deliberately, without opening the blinds, he sat at a table with a glass vase of flowers on it and wrote unhurriedly, "Leave." He thought a bit, then, with the same expression, not yet entirely alert, he added, "I'm going with you" and opened the window on the brightly sunlit street.

The glass obstacle is finally removed, and Vanya enters a new life. Unlike his less fortunate doubles, he learns the liberating lesson that the relationship of the individual to the fact prevails over the fact. While several teachers repeat this point until the boy grasps its meaning, only one discloses the nature of the relationship itself. The image of the glass holds the key to the notion of clarity as the conceptual center of the text, connecting it also with Kuzmin's thoughts about it in his letter to Chicherin. This happens in the second part of the novella, when Vanya has a series of encounters with an Old Believer his age. During one of their conversations, the boy tells him:

[...] so you've been, after all, on the Unzha, the Vetluga, and the Moscow River, and you don't see anything except what concerns you, as though you were blind <...> How boring that is, you know. You're like an architect, let's say, who builds only churches, and not entire churches, but only cornices for churches, who travels the world and everywhere looks only at his cornices, without seeing the various people, nor how they live, how they think, pray, love, without seeing the trees and flowers of those places—without seeing anything but his cornices. A person should be like a river or a mirror, accepting whatever is reflected in him; just as on the Volga, sometimes there will be sun in him, sometimes clouds, and forests and tall mountains, or cities with churches—you should be open to

²⁷⁴ Shtrup tells Vanya that he is leaving Florence for Bari and invites him along on the page that precedes the ending. Kuzmin, *PE* 1:144.

everything equally, then everything will be integrated in you. If you latch onto just one thing, it will devour you, and greed is the worst thing of all, or religious ideas.²⁷⁵

Adumbrating the story of the Russian painter, Sasha likens fixation on a single object to blindness, contrasting it with a model of vision whereby the subject is both witness and also a participant in a world in a state of constant flux. He describes the original “Edenic” gaze: the river’s reflective surface is an obvious alternative to St. Paul’s obscure glass. Unlike all other references to reflections in *Wings*, his is a figure of speech: a human being should be “like” the river. Nominally, this is a simile, but in fact, it’s a metaphor, enacted numerous times throughout the text already. As the episode with the doll of St. Luigi demonstrates, the self as an image is also the self as text. Sasha’s simile is an instance where the text gains awareness of itself, thereby obtaining a relationship to itself, and not only describing, but enacting clarity. An explicitly secondary reality—a reflected image—transforms itself from a simulacrum into the original before the reader’s eyes. This is the paradox of Kuzmin’s clarity: the attainment of the “right” relationship to oneself means integration of the self and a childlike or “Franciscan” acceptance and evenness of perception and expression, at the same time as it signifies a separation.

Elaborating on the idea of reflection is the novella’s commentary on the hermeneutics of reading. When Vanya reads aloud a cryptic section from Dante’s *Purgatorio* to his tutor, Ida Golberg, she teaches him not to interpret the text too literally or too pedantically:

“...e vidi che con riso
Udito havenan l'ultimo construtto;
Poi a la bella donna torna il viso,—
and he noticed that they had listened to the final conclusion with a smile, then turned to the beautiful lady.”
“The beautiful lady—is that the contemplation of active life?”

²⁷⁵ Kuzmin, *Proza 1906-1912 gg.* 1, 107.

“Vanya, you can't believe everything the commentators say, except for the historical background. Understand it simply and beautifully, that's all. Otherwise you'll get some kind of mathematics instead of Dante.”²⁷⁶

Vanya reads the concluding lines of Canto XXVIII, where the Pilgrim reaches the top of Mount Purgatory and enters Earthly Paradise. There he is greeted by the beautiful Matelda, who walks along a riverbank singing and gathering flowers.²⁷⁷ Her precise identity resists interpretation, but Vanya is right to think that she is associated with Laban's daughter, Leah, who appears in the Pilgrim's dream in the previous Canto, and who represents active life. Her sister, whom he also dreams, represents a life of contemplation. More important than her precise relationship with Leah and Rachel is the idea that Matelda is the “unfallen version of one of the original inhabitants” of Eden.²⁷⁸ She is a prelapsarian being, as well as an object of desire untainted by the fall. When Ida rejects various types of hermeneutic discourse except specific historical knowledge, she herself acts as Matelda, greeting Vanya on the threshold of terrestrial paradise, which in their case is not only the boy's new life, but also art.

Since the trajectory of Vanya's evolution delivers him into Edenic clarity, it is impossible for various interpretations of Matelda to not play a part in her appearance in *Wings*. Since the narrative repeatedly emphasizes relationship to fact over the fact itself, Ida does not teach willful ignorance or naïve and oversimplified reading, just as Sasha's simile is only pseudo-naïve when it suggests that a person simply “reflects” things, presumably, “as they are.” The idea is that interpretation, meaning or knowledge emerge spontaneously, as if of their own volition, and always as something other than merely a replica of the original. In other words, metaphor is the

²⁷⁶ Kuzmin, *PE* 1:93.

²⁷⁷ Dante Alighieri, *La Commedia Divina. Purgatorio*. Ed. Emilio Pasquini and Antonio Quaglio. (Milano: Garzanti, 1982), 453-465.

²⁷⁸ Teodolinda Barolini, “Purgatorio 28: Losing Springtime.” *Commento Baroliniano*, Digital Dante. Center for Digital Research and Scholarship. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2015. <http://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/purgatorio/purgatorio-28/>

structure that governs the relationship between the “object” or fact of contemplation, and its interpretation. For example, in the course of the novella, Vanya comes to know himself as something other than the passive subject of his biography: the historical character discovers himself as an eternal being. The narrator of the “Histoire,” conversely, creates a text wherein he is present as his own historical, biographical double. Within *Wings* this concept signifies also an identity within the dichotomy “text—image”: a hagiography appears as a doll, which, by virtue of the material of which it is made—wax—refers back to writing. Sasha’s trope is the focal point of a series of transformations from “self” to image, from image to text, and from text back to image again. The mimetic process yields difference without destroying identity.

When in the last sentence of the novella Vanya opens the window of his chamber, he removes the barrier between himself and the life that beckoned him for the duration of the narrative. This symbolic gesture signifies that as he surrenders to love, he embodies Sasha’s metaphor and on the symbolic level becomes the clear surface that reflects and integrates all things indiscriminately. In other words, Vanya obtains the liberating point of view or “relationship to fact” that this metaphor suggests, and finally becomes an “original.” His position has another name: perspective, understood precisely as a subjective position, a point of view. Indeed, according to the scholar and critic Gleb Morev, perspective is Kuzmin’s “truly major theme” that has “formed his poetic myth and determined the dramatic effect of his later works.”

²⁷⁹ But as it is evident from my discussion of *Wings*, this theme is as central to his first literary success as it is to his later works. It is therefore highly significant that Kuzmin’s hero experiences liberation before an open window in Florence: the conclusion of the novella

²⁷⁹ G. Morev, “Kazus Kuzmina.” *Dnevnik 1934 goda*. By Mikhail Kuzmin (St. Petersburg: Iz-vo Ivana Limbakha, 1998), 6.

positions its hero in front of an important perspectival device that was invented in Florence.

Vanya's action, however, symbolically subverts its function.

Perspective emerged in fifteenth-century Florence, and was from the beginning associated with the origin myth in the book of Genesis 1-3, and Pauline description of the human condition as seeing "through a glass, darkly." It is a method that organizes the visual field according to the observer's position in space, and therefore introduces the notion of subjectivity into representation. Before the word entered artists' vocabulary, it was not only part of the optical science of the Middle Ages, but was actually synonymous with optical science. It was also inextricable from medieval mysticism. In 1425 a Florentine architect, Filippo Brunelleschi, was the first to apply optics to the art of representation.²⁸⁰ Brunelleschi's method hinged on a "centric point"—eventually renamed "vanishing point"—that allowed him to create a realistic representation of a scene from a single point of view. Standing at the western door of the Florentine Duomo, he faced away from the Baptistry directly in front of the Duomo, and painted it looking at its mirror reflection instead. Afterward, he made a hole in the center of his small painted panel, and asked his viewers to look through the back of the painting at its reflection in the mirror that the viewer held out in his hand in front of the painted panel. The viewer saw his own eye embedded in the middle of the composition. The eye "certified" the veracity of Brunelleschi's representation, and its own centrality to the painted image. To understand the significance of this ritualistic action, it is important to know that as one of the "founders" of the Renaissance, Brunelleschi was working within the parameters of medieval optics which he simply applied to a painting, resulting in the idea that the perpendicular axis from the eye to the "certification" point to the picture plane represented how God "conceived the universe itself in

²⁸⁰ Samuel Y. Edgerton, *The Mirror, the Window, and the Telescope* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 40- 41. Edgerton dates the association between the word and the method to 1480.

his divine mind's eye at Genesis," and how grace passed from its divine source to the soul of the believer.²⁸¹ Since the divine gaze originally meets his creation in Eden, Brunelleschi's choice of the Baptistery as his subject is also highly symbolic. Looking through the peephole made in the painting, the viewer entered Eden: a copy became an original.

Brunelleschi's use of the mirror was not merely a technical tool, but a symbolic response to the problem of clarity as stated by St. Paul:

[...] Brunelleschi's demonstration permitted viewers to believe that they had penetrated the very "enigma" of the mirror, to see both the virtual reflection and actual Baptistery "face to face" behind the reflection, just as Saint Paul had preached. [...] By focusing his perpendicular axis, across the typological *Paradiso*, and onto the eastern entrance to the Baptistery with its own sacramental symbolism, Brunelleschi was identifying his certification point as if it were in the very eye of God as he created the first human beings during the sixth day of Genesis. Brunelleschi's viewers were enticed to believe themselves envisioning the very process by which "the prophets see God or his divine mysteries behind the images and likenesses of sensible things."²⁸²

The scholar explains that this gesture would have been considered "promethean" in scope:

"Prometheus unbound! What Brunelleschi had just wrestled from the Creator's closet [...] might indeed be likened to that other famous Olympian thievery, granting to mortal man the heretofore sacred privilege of imagining nature just as God himself projected it from his own divine eye."²⁸³

His invention intended to recover the innocence lost with the fall of Adam, responding to Corinthians 1:13, with a reiteration of the first two chapters of Genesis. The paintings of the Baptistery were a defiant act of *seeing through* apostle's dim mirror. This concept became so firmly associated with perspective, that its clarity, rooted as it was in medieval mysticism, was

²⁸¹ Ibid., 26-29.

²⁸² Ibid., 49-50. Edgerton refers to a "typological *Paradiso*" because Brunelleschi's panel represented a view onto the eastern façade of the Baptistery, for which Lorenzo and Vittorio Ghiberti's had created their "Gates of Paradise".

²⁸³ Ibid., 76.

the beginning of the world's demystification. Based on the idea of excision of the eye from the body, and the image from the eye, it eventually contributed to the creation of the lens, the telescope, and the camera, all of which purport to show objective reality. Erwin Panofsky, the eminent scholar of the Renaissance and author of the foundational *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, gruffly calls this cyclopean claim of the subject to an objective truth “the objectification of the subjective.”²⁸⁴

The history of this representational device would appear only tangentially related to Kuzmin's narrative, were it not for the fact the word “perspective” contains an etymological ambiguity that renders it highly relevant to his work. Commenting on Dürer's definition of “*perspectiva*” as “a Latin word which means ‘seeing through,’” Panofsky states: “The word ought to be derived not from *perspicere* meaning ‘to see through,’ but from *perspicere* meaning ‘to see clearly’; thus it amounts to a literal translation of the Greek term *optikē*”²⁸⁵ In the Western tradition, it came to be firmly associated with the concept of “seeing through,” however. The first person to secure this definition was Leon Battista Alberti, also a native of Florence, and the next artist to contribute to the development of the method. He replaced the mirror with the more pragmatic and instantly widely used “window”: a gridded glass pane now separated the artist from the scene, simplifying the process of copying the original.²⁸⁶ The window was a deadpan, mysticism-free approach to realistic rendering that eventually led to the mechanization of representation and caused Panofsky to accuse perspective of objectifying the subjective.

Kuzmin knew Florentine history and culture exceptionally well. The writer and art historian Vsevolod Petrov records him as saying: “There are only three subjects that I know truly

²⁸⁴ Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 67-72.

²⁸⁵ Panofsky, *Perspective*, 27, 75. Dürer's definition refers to the visual pyramid. The artist was thought to represent its cross section, thus “seeing through” it.

²⁸⁶ Edgerton, *The Mirror*, 126-132.

well: in music—the XVIII century before and including Mozart, in painting—Italian quattrocento, and the Gnostic teachings.”²⁸⁷ Not only the Italian quattrocento, but Italy in general plays an extremely important role in Kuzmin’s world not. In the 1920 poem “Italy” he calls it his “second mother.” Incidentally, the poem also contains an image of the “wings of the heart.”²⁸⁸ His knowledge of Italian culture was extensive, and included Franciscan poetry, Dante, *Commedia dell’Arte*, XVIII century literature and XIX century opera. For this reason, it is particularly poignant that in conversation with Petrov he mentions specifically the fifteenth century—the height of Florentine Renaissance— as one of his absolute favorite periods. Italy, especially Florence, is a kind of Eden for the protagonist of Kuzmin’s novella as well. Here Vanya’s heart finally sprouts its “wings.” Although his liberating gesture might only coincidentally evoke the specifics of the history of perspective, it implies a reversal of its history nonetheless: a decision in favor of *seeing clearly* against *seeing through*.

Pictorial perspective was a metaphor that claimed to recapture “original” vision. It was an instance of mimesis that claimed to mend a severed genealogy. When in Russia at the turn of the century the problematic of the “original” vision once again became relevant, perspective as this central paradigm of Western vision reentered artists’ vocabulary.²⁸⁹ As the Symbolists and

²⁸⁷ Vsevolod Petrov, “Kaliostro: vospominaniia i razmyshleniia o M.A. Kuzmine.” *Novyi zhurnal* 163 (1986): 81-116. Petrov specifically mentions the importance of quattrocento Florence for Kuzmin on 98 and 101. Kuzmin’s love and extensive knowledge of the Italian Renaissance (and the Italian eighteenth century), is well-known, but since further in this paper I am examining texts that Kuzmin wrote between 1904 and 1906, it is particularly apt how many references—and declarations of love of Italy—figure on the pages of his 1905 diary. See for example: August 27, 30, September 2, 4, 9, 13, 15, 22, 29, when he writes that he loves Italy “most of all,” October 8, 21, etc.

²⁸⁸ Kuzmin, “Italiia,” *SS* 2:282-283.

²⁸⁹ In the essay “V ozhidanii gimna Apollonu” (1909), published in the inaugural issue of the magazine *Apollo*, Alexandre Benois proclaims: “Tomorrow must begin a new Renaissance.” Anticipation of a new Renaissance was a common sentiment of the age. Interpretation of the

World of Art artists and thinkers alike sought to reconsider perspective as the central trope of the relationship between the subject and the object, and between the ersatz and the original, they looked to the visual culture of the Italian Renaissance as its origin. Images that referred not only to Italy, but to the specifically Renaissance representational tropes as well as iconic Italian works of art appear, for example, in Viacheslav Ivanov's poem "Transparency" (1904). In the poem he describes a personified mystical Transparency as resting on the brow of the Gioconda, and appearing in her smile: "Ethereal Transparency of tenderness, / You slumber on the Gioconda's forehead," "Transparency! of a divine mask, / You hover in the Gioconda's smile." ["Prozrachnost' Vozdushnou laskoi / Ty spish' na chele Dzhiofondy," "Prozrachnost'! bozhestvennoi maskoi / Ty reesh' v ulybke Dzhiofondy"].²⁹⁰ Ivanov also implores Transparency to make limpid the "veil of Maya." An emblem of the Italian Renaissance coexists in this poem with esoteric Indian thought and the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. Ivanov requests the ability to see through the phenomenal to a more real reality, but as he does so, he references da Vinci's Mona Lisa as a figure on the threshold between the visible and the invisible.

In 1904 the Symbolist Andrei Bely publishes his programmatic essay "Symbolism as World View," where he also references perspective:

Not long ago it was thought that the world had been thoroughly investigated. All the hidden depths had disappeared from the horizon, and only a vast, flat plane stretched away into the distance. All the eternal values, which previously had revealed new perspectives, had become a thing of the past. Everything had lost its value. But the urge to seek faraway things had not disappeared from men's hearts. At a certain point the desire arose for new perspectives, and the heart of man began once again to inquire after the eternal values.²⁹¹

research into new ways of seeing as new perspective should be viewed in this context. A. Benois. "V ozhidanii gimna Apollonu," *Apollon* 1 (October 1909): 5-11.

²⁹⁰ Ivanov, *SS* 1:737-738.

²⁹¹ A. Belyi. "Simvolizm kak miroponimanie." *Simvolizm kak miroponimanie*, Ed. L.A. Slugai (Moscow: Respublika, 1994), 244. At the time of writing this essay, Bely's Moscow branch of Symbolism, called the "Argonauts," was already a year old.

Here, perspective is associated with spaciousness, the aforementioned Symbolist “vistas,” nostalgia for the ability to have aspirations, a desire to desire the “original.” Bely describes Nietzsche as a new Prometheus who restores depth to the shallow world: “He brought depth from the immortal distance” [On prines glubinu iz bessmertnykh dalei], and describes his effect on Bely’s generation: “our former myopic naïveté is gone” [net v nas prezhnei blizorukoi naivnosti].²⁹² Nietzsche is the “father” of a new perspective, though it is still a figure of “seeing through” to a truer reality.²⁹³ The finale of *Wings* demonstrates that Kuzmin rejected this kind of vision wholeheartedly.²⁹⁴ Neither the concept of seeing through the illusory world, nor the essentially identical idea of setting out in search of the elusive eternal values in the post-

²⁹² Ibid., 248.

²⁹³ The theme of perspective plays an important role in Bely’s *Petersburg*. Published in 1913, it is set in St. Petersburg in the momentous year of 1905. The text contains endless play on the word “perspective” [*prospekt*], meaning “avenue,” including the city’s central Nevsky “prospect,” as well as “perspective” as an emblem of Western rationalism and its uncanny absurdity—that, Bely believes, represents the shifty substrate of the city’s history. At the same time, perspective retains the meaning that Bely attributed to this concept in “Symbolism as Worldview.” This becomes apparent in chapters where Bely references the Art Nouveau aesthetic and the World of Art fashion of the period. In the chapter entitled “Sofia Petrovna Likhutina,” example, he describes this character’s interior as “lacking perspective” – just as the Japanese prints on her walls lack perspective. Her mind is as cluttered as her quarters. In Bely’s text this state of “flatness” and the same time clutter is directly related to “perspective” as the rational order that the capital supposedly exemplifies.

²⁹⁴ Unlike Bely, he embraced myopia for its ability to erase the insignificant details leaving only what is important. In Kuzmin’s 1934 diary there is an entry on the magic of myopic vision: “Rain on the leaves. When the sun comes out after the rain, and all the bushes start to glimmer like diamonds and crystals, and a kind of Hoffmannesque magic seems to breathe beneath a gentle breeze. It all lasts for an oddly long time when I’m looking without my glasses. I put on my glasses, and all of the raindrops vanish somewhere, each leaf protrudes separately, and there is no breast, no breath, no fairy, as though a devil from an Andersen fairy tale had thrust a shard from a mirror into my eye. Glasses constitute one of the causes of rationalism and pessimism. Myopia is the foundation of idealism and painting in the narrow sense of the word.” M. Kuzmin. *Dnevnik 1934 goda* (St. Petersburg: Iz-vo Ivana Limbakha, 1998), 37.

Nietzschean world would have appealed to him: Kuzmin's philosophy and aesthetic was, according to Bogomolov and Malmstad, "pre-Kantian."²⁹⁵

Kuzmin's Clarity and the World of Art Aesthetics

Vanya's gesture and the novella on the whole are informed by the aesthetic of the World of Art, a group of artists with whom Kuzmin became close in 1901, when he began to frequent an offshoot of the World of Art, the "Evenings of Contemporary Music," organized by Walter Nuvel, who was eventually to introduce Kuzmin to Ivanov.²⁹⁶ To an extent the interests of this Russian variant of the Art Nouveau movement overlapped with those of the Symbolists, leading some critics to believe that Symbolist philosophy nourished the World of Art, and that this movement "made concrete" but also a "vulgarized" of the Symbolist ideas.²⁹⁷ This view is appealing, but contestable, since there were significant differences in the motivations of artists in these groups. Unlike the Symbolists, the World of Art never attempted to transform the sense of absence and loss that so plagued people at the dawn of the new century into a site of theurgic conquest, but based their aesthetic on these sentiments. The members of the World of Art preferred that art speak for itself rather than serve metaphysical concepts. They also rejected the position of the artist as a medium between two worlds. Kuzmin certainly shared this position.²⁹⁸ Nikolai Bogomolov's essay "Viacheslav Ivanov and Kuzmin: On the History of the Relationship" describes the nuances of the relationship between the two after Kuzmin in one of

²⁹⁵ Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 131.

²⁹⁶ Bogomolov and Malmstad, *Mikhail Kuzmin*, 121-122.

²⁹⁷ E.V. Ermilova, *Teoriia i obraznyi mir russkogo simvolizma*, 102.

²⁹⁸ Magdalena Medarić, "Modern kak predavangardnyi stil'." 57-80, 71.

his novellas derided Anna Mintslova, who lived with Ivanov and effectively controlled him and his household with her spiritual teachings and theosophic visions.²⁹⁹

The World of Art artists believed themselves to be creators of beauty, and they valued playfulness and theater as a means of developing new approaches to it. They worked across several disciplines at once, and used the concept of artistic synthesis to create a dialog between as many different artistic media as possible, “translating” their aesthetic into music, graphic arts, theater, architecture and craft. Reacting against socially dogmatic realism, and much in the spirit of the European Art Nouveau, they rejected illusionism together with perspective, and instead mined the creative and emotional potential of flattened space, amply using it as they stylized their work after a variety of favored historical periods.

The stylizations by Alexandre Benois, Leon Bakst, Eugene Lanceray, and later Konstantin Somov were based on serious research. They revived Greek antiquity, Petrine Russia, and eighteenth-century Versailles with accuracy, transforming them according to their aesthetic and always with a sense of ironic, nostalgic, or both ironic and nostalgic distance from the imitated style. Reduced detail and flat surface carried expressive, emotional charge.³⁰⁰ Writing on this subject in an essay about Somov, Kuzmin observes that in Somov’s paintings the eighteenth century wears a mask that conceals “the smiling boredom of eternal repetition, the sundry, momentary enchantment of the lightest specks of dust as they fly into the meaningless void of oblivion and death” [“ulybaiushchaia skuka vechnogo povtoreniia, pestrogo i

²⁹⁹ Neither the novella “Double-Confidant” [“Dvoinoi Napersnik”], nor its caricature of Mintslova were the only factors contributing to the cooling of their relationship, but they certainly played an important role. N. Bogomolov, “Viacheslav Ivanov i Kuzmin: k istorii otnoshenii.” *Voprosy literatury* 1 (1998): 226-242.

³⁰⁰ Ahn Ji Young, “Problema ‘stilizatsii’ v russkoj dramaturgii nachala XX v.” ‘Mir iskusstva i stilizatsiia pod ‘balagan’ M. Kuzmina.” *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* # 1 (Summer 2001): Web. 15 August 2015.

minutnogo ocharovaniia legchaishikh pylinok, letiashchikh v bessmyslennuiu pustotu zabveniiia i smerti.”].³⁰¹ In this statement the association with Nietzsche is secondary to the emotional content of the work, as perceived by the viewer. Such representation shows the eighteenth century “original” in a new light, but also makes use of it for its own expressive purpose, of which devaluation is an integral part. Ivanov’s optimistic quest for the recovery of the “original” finds its pessimistic correlate.³⁰²

While in many respects Kuzmin’s work exemplifies the World of Art aesthetic, his relationship to the idea of “seeing clearly” sets him apart from the World of Art just as his relationship to the idea of “seeing through” sets him apart from the Symbolists. Like this group of artists, he championed the notion of surface and flatness, detectable even in his “gliding” style of writing, yet this idea is grounded in a philosophy that reaches beyond the scope of the World of Art.³⁰³ He associates it with clarity, a concept he first mentions in the letter to Chicherin. As previously mentioned, to see as on a clear surface, and to narrate “superficially” is for him to assert that the most profound is the most “surface,” and vice versa. This worldview underscores the availability of what is needed in the present, and rejects the anxiety of the void that Kuzmin describes in his essay on the World of Art painter Somov. It finds plenitude where others at this time see absence and loss.

Kuzmin’s perspective, an idea that means a point of view, signifies two contradictory ideas: integration and division. As the concept of integration or acceptance, it finds its expression

³⁰¹ Kuzmin, “Uslovnosti: stat’i ob iskusstve: K.A. Somov.” *PE* 3:628.

³⁰² Such a perspective on the “original” potentially devalues it. This effect of the World of Art aesthetic annoyed Ivanov. The artists of this group represented the decadence that he abhorred. But historically, the notion of the devaluation of the original proved inaccurate. Revzin credits the World of Art with the development of the Neoclassical style out of what initiated as playful stylization. Poignantly, he dates this shift to the year 1910. (Revzin, 88-89)

³⁰³ Gasparov, “Eshche raz o prekrasnoi iasnosti,” 83.

in Sasha's statement that the self should be like the surface of a river, or using another trope, like St. Paul's "glass" made clear. To be and to see like this means to make space for contradiction. This is why the narrator of *Wings* describes Vanya as experiencing mutually exclusive feelings of disappointment and curiosity, and the narrator of the poem "A Trip to Assisi" describes the view of the town as both shallow and deep. This position allowed Kuzmin to accept his own contradictory persona. In his personal correspondence from 1905 he makes a characteristic remark on this subject: "I do not acknowledge any ascents in life—or the fulfillment of any designs [...] and I do not have to stop casting back and forth between two points that are perfectly well known now" ["Ja ne priznaiu nikakikh voskhozhdenii i zhizni—kak i ispolneniia kakikh-to prednachertanii [...] i dlia dokazatel'stv etogo vovse ne dolzhen lomat' svoikh metanii mezhdutepерь otlichno izvestnymi dvumia tochkami."]³⁰⁴ Subsequent letters clarify that the "two points" refer to two distinct positions prevalent in two distinct demographic groups and social classes between which Kuzmin navigated during the unrests of that year. He finds no fault in occupying apparently conflicting positions at the same time. Unlike the Symbolists, who viewed life as a process of "ascents" and "descents," he abides with inconsistency.

In addition to this "equalizing" vision as a totality, Kuzmin's concept of seeing clearly also involves a confrontation of opposites. In this dynamic capacity it is not only a response to the image of St. Paul's obscure glass, but an elaboration of the apostle's notion of seeing "face to face," as well as an enactment of the idea of mimesis as difference. For example, in Kuzmin's "The Trout Breaks the Ice," clarity results from an encounter of lovers who are also "twins," who

³⁰⁴ "Kuzmin-Chicherinu." Letter. Oct. 1905. *Stikhotvoreniia. iz perepiski*. (Moscow: Progress-Pleiada, 2006), 384. On October 26, 1905, Kuzmin also writes in his diary: "I am deeply convinced that the life not only of a single person, but also of a country is not an ascent or a descent, but a series of coincidences" (62).

belong to either side of a barrier—a sheet of ice that grips the surface of a river.³⁰⁵ In *Wings* this concept is also present throughout the novella, but since Shtrup leads Vanya into a new “original” life, their relationship is not exactly that of equals. Still, their encounter is a moment of a “dynamic” collision between two opposing worlds, while his metaphoric crossing the glass barrier signals a journey to “Alexandria” – the realm of the eternal, and so also the dead. Not by chance, Shtrup’s last name conceals an unpleasant association with the Russian “trup” or “corpse.”

The “face to face” configuration involving a mirror, a page, or a canvas as the surface, and the observer or creator is consistent in Kuzmin’s oeuvre from the earlier “Classical” period to the later expressionist, hermetic one.³⁰⁶ As a dynamic, dialogic relationship between opposites it leads to the attainment of the fluid “reflective” vision that accommodates all beings. The discovery of personal perspective or “point of view” through love is a stage or a right of passage in the discovery of divine perspective. In this sense, Kuzmin’s approach to perspective recalls Brunelleschi’s original concept, but has none of its insistence on uniformity. On the contrary, it is anti-systematic, anti-mechanical and so represents an alternative to the “original” Renaissance invention. This is evident from his treatment of the issue at the heart of the problem of perspective: the face-to-face dynamic specifically as it applies to the relationship of the “original” and the “copy.”

³⁰⁵Gasparov, “Eshche raz o prekrasnoi iasnosti,” 110.

³⁰⁶ See Omry Ronen’s “Mikhail Kuzmin’s Symbolism in Connection with his Concept of the Book of Life” or Tatiana Tsivian’s “The Symbolism of Kuzmin’s Cycle ‘Fuji in a Saucer’” for an in-depth exploration of the relationship between the “reader” or “viewer” and text or a drawing. Omry Ronen, “Simvolika Mikhaila Kuzmina v sviazi s ego kontseptsiei knigi zhizni,” in Ronald Vroon and John Malmstad (eds.), *Kul’tura russkogo modernizma* (Moscow: Nauka, 1993), 291-297; T.V. Tsivian, “K analizu tsikla Kuzmina ‘Fuzii v bliudechke’” in G. Morev (ed.), *Mikhail Kuzmin i russkaia kul’tura XX veka* (Leningrad: Sovet po istorii mirovoi kul’tury, 1990), 43-47.

Personal perspective attained through love leads to an “eternal” or “objective” vision. But its “objective” nature is quite distinct from the “objectified” subjectivity of perspective, because it is dialogic. Mikhail Bakhtin’s definition of stylization, which plays such an important role in Kuzmin’s writing, elucidates this concept. Bakhtin writes:

The stylist uses the other’s word as other and thus casts a light objective shadow on that word. True, the word does not become an object. After all, the stylist values the totality of the devices of the other’s word precisely as the expression of a certain point of view. He works with the other point of view. That is why a certain objective shadow falls precisely on the point of view itself, and it [the point of view] consequently becomes relative.³⁰⁷

As the narrator incorporates an original as the “unfamiliar” or “other” perspective into his text, his own voice absorbs—not the words of the other—but their “object-ness,” in a sense, becoming “other” to itself. This narrative stance is what creates the space of clarity. So, when love for Shtrup transforms Vanya into an “original” and he symbolically crosses over to an eternal dimension, he behaves like a stylized text that has obtained its individuality and at the same time a certain “objectivity” by adopting the point of view of the original. Notably, Vanya does this literally, when he sees himself in the mirror and quotes Shtrup’s words in reference to his own reflection as an original. The dialogic “face to face” relationship between the copy and the original leads to the discovery of clarity as an Edenic perspective. The “Histoire” actualizes the plot of *Wings* as a narrative mode, and it is possible to apply this idea to the diaries in general. The narrator appears to speak from a place of otherness or “object-ness,” detached from his own biographical, historical self, though not indifferent to it. Some of this distance results from the ironic title with its reference to an eighteenth century instructional autobiography of a religious figure, or conversely, Casanova’s irreverent *Histoire de ma Vie*. Some of it originates in

³⁰⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, 7 vols. (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 2000), 2:85-86.

the narrator's purposeful nonchalance with respect to the question of knowledge. It is important to the narrator to demonstrate that understanding his own psychological motivations and states, for example, is secondary to the list of unfolding events and the cadence of the narration itself. As a result, the narrator's historical "twin" has an independent existence within the lucid space of the narrative voice, sharing none of its clarity. This narrative voice is the space that accommodates not only his younger self, but potentially anything that it narrates. But a confrontation between the narrator and the character as two "representations" of presumably the same subject reveals the narration itself to be the prototype, while the younger self has yet to become authentic.

"The New Hull": Clarity as Magic

In the 1920s, Kuzmin experiences the influence of expressionism, imported into Russia from the Weimar Republic in the form of music, cinema and literature. As his texts reach new heights of mastery and complexity, the principle of clarity not only remains at the core of his worldview, but comes to the forefront as a device laid bare and made to actively contribute to the new "dramatic effect" of the work. Various images of flat surfaces become triggers of plot development rather than static symbols. For example, in the cycle of poems "The New Hull"(1924), the "clear" narrative voice enters the text, incarnated as a character alongside others. The author plays three roles: a viewer of a film and therefore an observer; a lover "face to face" with the object of his love; and a creator who watches his narrative unfold as he creates it upon the glass of a "magic crystal." Clarity appears as the passive principle of observing transformation, as a dynamic, dialogic, transformative relationship between lovers who are separated from each other, and as the active principle of creation that encapsulates them.

The poems of “The New Hull” are dedicated to Lev Rakin, with whom Kuzmin had a relationship in 1923. He believed Rakin resembled the actor Paul Richter in the role of Edgar Hull in Fritz Lang’s expressionist masterpiece *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* [*Dr. Mabuse der Spieler*]. Furthermore, Rakin reminded him of Vsevolod Kniazev, a young man with whom Kuzmin had a relationship in 1910. In 1913 Kniazev, who soon also began an ill-fated love affair with St. Petersburg’s famous beauty, Olga Glebova-Sudeikina, shot himself underneath her portrait, and died a few days later. He plays a part in Kuzmin’s “The Trout Breaks the Ice.” In his 1923 diary Kuzmin notes that Rakin reminds him not only of Kniazev, but of the 1910s in general.³⁰⁸

Prior to discussing Kuzmin’s poem it is necessary to say a few words about Lang’s film and Edgar Hull specifically. In this expressionist masterpiece Hull is a supporting character: a stunningly handsome, wealthy and noble, if naïve, young man, who falls victim to the villainous Dr. Mabuse. Mabuse is a criminal mastermind, who hypnotizes his victims. He hypnotizes Hull, too, and then steals his fortune at the gambling table. Although Hull never remembers what happened to him, he eventually recovers his senses and seeks to help the police capture his offender. To his misfortune, he falls in love with Mabuse’s loyal accomplice, who leads him into a trap where he is murdered.³⁰⁹ Hull’s fate resonates with that of some of Kuzmin’s characters discussed here, such as the enchanted and doomed Russian painter from Kuzmin’s *Wings*.

Lang’s Dr. Mabuse, whose Nietzschean slogan is: “no love—only desire, no happiness—only will for power” represents the hypnotic power of cinema in “the age of mechanical

³⁰⁸ Mikhail Ratgauz, “Kuzmin-kinozritel’.” *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* 13 (1992): 52-82. Kuzmin makes these observations in his 1923 diary, October 10 and November 16.

³⁰⁹ *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler*. Dir. Fritz Lang. UFA Studios, 1922. Film.DVD.

reproduction.”³¹⁰ Consistently with Walter Benjamin’s statement that cinema “introduces us to the unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses,” he manipulates the psyche by means of optics: for example, he uses eye contact and the flickering of reflected light upon his spectacles to invade Hull’s psyche.³¹¹ Mabuse hypnotizes the passive viewer by “seeing through” him. He could have inspired Benjamin’s later observation that the camera acts like a surgeon, as it delves beyond what meets the eye and extract objects from their environment.³¹² Benjamin famously bemoans the inevitable violence of the mechanical copy and privileges the “original,” defined by the aura as “the essence of all that is transmissible from [a thing’s] beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.”³¹³ He also describes the aura itself as “a phenomenon of distance,” and contrasts the surgeon’s approach with that of the magician, whose art has an effect only if the “phenomenon of distance” is observed.³¹⁴

In the first poem of “The New Hull” Kuzmin’s narrator watches the film, intertwining the account of the events that unfold on the screen with his personal reflections. One of these is an observed resemblance between the film character and someone in the narrator’s life: “On tak pokhozh... / Ne potomu l’ o nem zagovorila muza?”³¹⁵ He is so similar... / Is that not why the muse began to speak of him?” The narrator proceeds to focus especially on the scene, where Lang zooms in on Mabuse’s face to express the powerful effect of his eyes on the victims—and

³¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt. (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 237.

³¹¹ *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler*. Dir. Fritz Lang. 2.32.

³¹² Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” 223, 222.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 221, 238.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 222, 233.

³¹⁵ Kuzmin, *SS* 2:419-440.

on the viewers. Kuzmin's narrator, conversely, addresses his protagonist as if anticipating Benjamin's observation about the relationship between the surgeon and the magician:

But a gaze, obstinate and ardent,
Follows you just as intently.
Don't be afraid: it will do no harm,
Your nape won't start to hurt.
It is a stargazer watching to see
Which way a star will flow.

No tak zhe prystal'no sedit
Za Vami vzgliad, upriam i pylok.
Ne boites': on ne povredit,
Ne zabolit u Vas zatylok.
To karaulit zvezdochet,
Kakim putem zvezda techet.

Kuzmin references the moment when Hull, unaware of Mabuse's presence, who has already spotted him in his binoculars, begins to experience the effect of the hypnosis. He is suddenly overcome with a headache, and as he grasps the back of his head, he has already unwittingly ceded his autonomy to the doctor. At this crucial instance, Kuzmin's "stargazer" reverses perspective, from a close-up, to "zooming out" to a view of the night's sky. He then begins his version of the tale that will pluck Hull from the flat screen and the invasive "face-to-back of the head" gaze of the villain, and restore him to clarity.

The rest of the poems narrate an encounter between the speaker and the new Hull. Of course, this is a tale whereby the copy—Hull—transforms into an "original," overcoming his history not in the form of a biography, but a linear narrative. Notably, in the second poem of the cycle Kuzmin explicitly renounces his earlier approach to stylization:

He who has resolved to love you
Must forget antiquity,
And I am ready to give up
Beauty spots and wigs,
The retrospective stage prop
Lies abandoned like unneeded rags,
Today's winged hour
Laughs from resounding eyes [...]

Antichnost' nado pozabyt'
Tomu, kto vzdumal Vas liubit',
I otkazat'sia ia gotov
Ot mushek i ot parikov,
Retrospektivnyi rekvizit
Nenuzhnoi vetosh'iu lezhit,
Segodniashnii, krylatyi chas
Smeetsia iz zvenishchikh glaz [...]

The rest of the poem then proceeds as a double negation, abandoning of the Classical prototypes popular in the early 1900s, and overriding *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler* as another original. In both cases, however, the prototypes remain in the subtext of the new tale, as the metaphorically “dead” twin, because the narrator invites associations with Classicism, the World of Art, Kniazev, etc., at the same time as he proposes that he has forgotten about them.³¹⁶ The air of stylization and with it a certain “object-ness” permeates the entire poem, but now the “other” whose “intonation” the narration absorbs, is even less stable than before—or so the text would have the reader believe. The forgotten World of Art “stage props,” the film, and such foreign elements as the words “mister” and “Stettin” are some of the elements that contribute to the stylized feel of the work.

The paradox of the poem—though this holds true to an extent in the novella as well— is that clarity as the “phenomenon of distance,” analogous also with the “object-ness” of the narration, results from a death: the “real” Hull and his unfortunate fate, Kniazev, the disappearance of many of the central figures of the 1910s together with the aesthetic of this time period inform the encounter between the lovers in the poem and inspire their love. The narrator views his beloved through the lens of the dead. Conversely, the beloved is a kind of lens, through which the past becomes alive: “A mne ves' mir otkrylsia Vami,” says the narrator in one of the poems. “And the whole world was revealed to me through you.”

The relationship between the two lovers is in many ways analogous to the one that will figure in “The Trout Breaks the Ice”: the two lovers are mystically connected, yet belong to distinctly different realms separated by a demarcation line. The screen, a pane of glass, the shoreline, and the lover’s eyes all play the role of the impenetrable glassy barrier. But while in

³¹⁶ Ratgauz very aptly uses the term “palimpsest” in reference to the relationship between “The New Hull” and the 1910s. Ratgauz, “Kuzmin-kinozritel’,” 54.

the eighth poem of the cycle the beloved appears as a corpse, and in the tenth poem he is Endymion—a mythic beautiful boy who is eternally asleep—“The New Hull” has none of the macabre characteristics of “The Trout Breaks the Ice.” Its imagery and prosody is luminous, and the love it describes is spiritual and liberating, and untainted by the interference of a meddlesome femme fatale.

The “face to face” encounter with the beloved in the narrative is an instance of the clarity of love between two people that transforms itself into the all-encompassing clarity as divine—or near-divine vision. While the image of a river or the ocean plays an important role in the poem, Kuzmin also uses another important motif: that of a blood transfusion that happens across the barrier between the two men.³¹⁷ This image and concept is connected to the idea of clarity as a fluid all-encompassing sphere of metamorphosis.

In the second poem of the cycle, as the narrator looks into Hull’s eyes and is overwhelmed by memories of “all we love, with which we burn” [“vse, chto my liubim, chem gorim”], he sees it all not as in a fog—not through a glass, darkly—but “as though the wine of memory gushes forth” [“a slovno bryznulo vino / vospominanii”]. This symbolic spilling of the blood signals the commencement of the alchemic action of poetry. In the eighth poem, the alchemist beholds the dead body of his beloved, but his death is not what it appears to be. While the dead man’s glassy eyes represent the barrier between the two lovers, and there is no pulse, the body is warm: “I kiss...closer...the chest is warm... / neither tremor nor pulse... / The minute flowed into eternity... / Art is incontrovertible!” [“Tseluiu... blizhe... grud’ tepla.../ni sodroganiia, ni pul’sa.../Minuta v vechnost’ protekla.../ Neprerekaemo iskusstvo!”]. The beloved is in the realm of the eternal, and the alchemist refuses to revive him—just as the

³¹⁷This is one of the central tropes in “The Trout Breaks the Ice” as well. Gasparov, “Eshche raz o prekrasnoi iasnosti,” 92, 98.

narrator refused to revive the “stage props” of the past, because a homunculus would upset the necessary binary separation.

I could, I could! ... Delirium is fruitless!
To believe and not believe the hope,
Agonizingly capture the response
In your transparently gray eyes,
Soar up and fall....Fire and ice...
Everything alive is blissfully unstable.
Cabalistic joy
Does not produce such raptures.

Ia mog by, mog!... Naprasnyi bred!
Nadezhde verit' i ne verit',
Tomitel'no lovit' otvet
V tvoikh glazakh prozrachno serykh,
Vzletat' i padat'... Zhar i led...
Zhivoe vse—blazhenno shatko.—
Takikh vostorgov ne daet
Kabbalisticheskoe schast'e.

Particularly poignant is Kuzmin’s blunt statement of his major theme: life is not only “blissfully” unstable, but instability is its condition. In death there is life, in sleep there is wakefulness, the subject is object-like, and vice versa. They are interconnected, yet distinct.

Finally, in the tenth poem this theme is reiterated, this time with reference to a sacrifice:

He finds sweet, warm sleep...
Suddenly a voice, simple and thin,
Sings: “You sleep, Endymion,
Magic child!
You nurtured me,
Enchanted yourself,
Accept the influx of mutual efforts.”

Nakhodit sladkii, teplyi son...
Vdrug golos, prost i tonok,
Poet: “Ty spish’ Endimion,
Magicheskii rebenok!
Menia vzrastil,
Sebia plenil,
Primi zh pritok vzaimnykh sil.”

In this stanza the roles switch: now the sleeping beloved narrates as he hears the voice of the poet, who explains that the “enchanted” twin has sacrificed himself—his blood is the wine that has set things into motion earlier in the cycle. Now the poet returns the debt: his poetry is the “influx of mutual efforts” [pritok vzaimnykh sil] that keeps Endymion alive.

The concluding poem in the cycle “lays bare the device” of the poem—if this formalist term may be applied to a symbolic object that has an obviously magical, mystical function.

I hold an invisible crystal,
As though a multitude of mirrors
Had joined facets.
There is a particular light in each cell:
The gold of coming years,
Or the shine of memories.

Derzhu nevidannyi kristall,
Kak budto mnozhestvo zerkal
Soedinilo grani.
Osobyi v kazhdoi kletke svet:
To zoloto griadushchikh let,
To blesk vospominanii.

The first stanza of the poem reveals Pushkin's poetics as the major—indeed, the most important—subtext of the poem. In the eight chapter of *Eugene Onegin* Pushkin references a “magic crystal” in which as he started writing his novel in verse, he was not yet able to discern its ending. In the same stanza he also calls the novel his “fellow traveler” [*sputnik*]: a trope that in Kuzmin's oeuvre from *Wings* to “The New Hull” becomes a personification. Both Vanya Smurov and the beloved in the poem are not only who they appear to be, but the text itself. Given the personal circumstances to which “The New Hull” alludes, a comparison between the enchanted “twin” and Pushkin may seem much too blunt. But Kuzmin's allusion to *Eugene Onegin* specifically in the context of his concept of clarity is also not subtle. Both in terms of style and worldview the poet consciously, but also organically resurrected Pushkin's aesthetic that Boris Gasparov defines as “aphoristic precision, economy of means, ease of expression.”³¹⁸

Kuzmin's image of the magic crystal with its many facets and endless transformative possibilities is a more dynamic and more complex version of Sasha's flowing river as all-encompassing clarity. Unlike in the novella, however, in the poem the observer is also explicitly the co-creator whose method of observation—creation is explicitly presented as “play.” Although unlike Sasha, the narrators of the poem enact the principle of clarity, rather than engage in didactic commentary, Kuzmin concludes the cycle with a kind of “moral,” summarizing his philosophy in six flawless lines:

³¹⁸ B. Gasparov, *Poeticheskii iazyk Pushkina kak fakt istorii russkogo literaturnogo iazyka*. 73.

When love lives in you,
 Nothing will break the glass:
 Neither a hammer nor a bullet.
 I walk closer to the window,
 But no matter which way I turn the crystal,
 I see only the image of Hull.

Kogda liubov' v tebe zhivet,
 Stekla nichto ne razob'et:
 Ni molotok, ni pulia.
 Ia blizhe podkhozhu k oknu,
 No kak kristall ni povernu
 Vse vizhu obraz Gulia.

Kuzmin's 1921 poem "Pushkin," however, it appears less so.³¹⁹ The word "life," conceptually crucial in "The New Hull" in general and in its last stanza in particular, sets the theme of this poem in first line: He's alive! / Everyone's soul is imperishable, / But he especially lives!" "On zhiv! / U vsekh dusha netlenna, / No on osobenno zhivet!" "Life," "living," "enliven" and other variants appear eight times throughout the text. Pushkin is also described as rushing toward a "line": "K odnoii cherte napravlen beg," suggesting the line drawn between the two opponents at a duel, that is, the line between life and death. Finally, he is also the one who builds a bridge from "the land whence there is no return." ["Iz stran, otkuda net vozvrata/ cherez goda on brosil most."]. Once again, in "the New Hull" Kuzmin alludes to the connection between his concept of clarity and Pushkin's poetics.

In prose as in poetry, Kuzmin conveys his concept of clarity using the trope of a reflective surface, such as a mirror, glass, or the magic crystal in "The New Hull." In 1910, the midpoint between the novella and this poem, Kuzmin writes his central text on the subject: "On Beautiful Clarity." He begins with a retelling of the biblical myth of creation:

When the hard elements came together in dry land, and water surrounded the earth in seas, rivers and lakes spread over it, and for the first time the world emerged from the state of chaos, and above it hovered the dividing Spirit of God. And through further delimitation of clear lines, that complex and beautiful world was formed, which, accepting or not accepting, artists strive to recognize, see in their own way, and depict. In every person's life there are times when, as a child, he suddenly says: "The chair and I," "The cat and I," "The ball and I," then, as an adult, "The world and I." ³²⁰

³¹⁹ Kuzmin, "Pushkin," *SS* 2:221-222.

³²⁰ Kuzmin, "O prekrasnoi iasnosti." *PE* 3:5-10.

Never mentioned directly, the image of the mirror insinuates itself in three key moments in the passage: first, as the Spirit flies over the fluvial surface of his creation, second, when a person begins to differentiate between herself and the objective world around her, thus beholding herself in the mirror as one such “object,” and third, when she begins to write, because the act of writing mimics divine creation through division and differentiation. The rest of the essay elaborates specifically on the latter, instructing writers to write with “Classical” clarity, and referencing Molière’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*:

Whether your soul is whole or fragmented [...] I implore you to be logical...in your conception, in the structure of your work, in syntax. [...] ³²¹

Kuzmin continues, quoting a scene in which Jourdain receives a lesson on proper word order and syntax. The appeal to greater efficiency and insistence on the transparency of language to meaning is evident. Kuzmin deliberately resorts to Molière as his example. The seventeenth century as the age of the Port Royal *Grammar* and Rationalist philosophy believed in universal reason and language as a transparent medium.³²² But Kuzmin’s—and Jourdain’s admonishments should be taken with a grain of salt. A decade later, in the 1920s, Kuzmin once again makes a series of statements regarding clarity in relationship to the *clarté* of French Classicism. In 1924, in an essay titled “Emotionality as the Basic Element of Art” [“Emotsional'nost' kak osnovnoi element iskusstva”] he writes: “art does not tolerate abstraction and rationality, which is why the country poorest in emotional art is France, a country where rationality and abstraction, generalization and an aspiration toward unchanging canons wove their principal nests.”

³²¹ Ibid., 6.

³²² Barbara Woshinsky, *Signs of Certainty: The Linguistic Imperative in French Classical Literature* (Stanford University, Department of French and Italian: Anma Libri, 1991), 4-5.

[“iskusstvo ne terpit otvlechnosti i rassudochnosti—vot pochemu emotsional’nym iskusstvom bednee vsego Frantsiia, strana, gde rassudochnost’ i otvlechnost’, obobshchennost’ i stremlenie k nezyblemym kanonam svili svoe glavnoe gnezdo.”]³²³ In this essay he also makes it a point to say that the “universal” clarity of French seventeenth-century drama is such a profoundly localized phenomenon that no one but the French themselves understand it. Deliberately anti-Classical is also Kuzmin’s definition of one of the fundamentally Classical ideas of perspective that he provides in the preface to his 1929 play “Hull’s Walks” [“Progulki Gulia”]:

The theme of “Hull’s Walks” is man’s search for an organizing element in life according to which all appearances in life and all acts would find their corresponding place and perspective. This search takes the form of a more precise differentiation of meanings, words, and appearances. In structure, the work consists in a series of scenes and lyrical fragments that are not united by the conditions of time and space, but connected only by associations of situations and word.³²⁴

The organizing element in life, on a surface, and in a text is as unburdened by the Classical stipulations regarding unity of time and space as it is free of St. Paul’s distinction between “now” and “then.” Kuzmin’s “Classicism” is a phenomenon that he defined against the conventions of any aesthetic system.

As in the texts already discussed in this chapter, the central metaphor in “On Beautiful Clarity” is a mirror, both as the surface of the Earth, and as writing. In a later essay, “Scales in a Net” [“Cheshuia v nevode”] (1922), he makes the connection between his views on writing and St. Paul’s interpretation of clarity: “All of the arts act on the imagination through the sensuous external senses. Only poetry is immediately face to face” [“Vse iskustva deistvuiut na voobrazhenie cherez chuvstvennye vneshnie chuvstva. Odná poeziia nepocredstvenno litsom k

³²³ Kuzmin, “Iskusstvo i zhizn’: emotsional’nost kak osnovnoi element iskustva,” *PE Vol. 3*, 375-380, 377.

³²⁴ Kuzmin, *SS* 3:735.

litsu.”]. He elaborates that all arts are equal and autonomous, but painting and sculpture are more “earthly” and “basic” [“zemnee i proshche”] because they operate with pre-existing forms.³²⁵ Unlike the visual arts, poetic language is “face to face” with the “un-earthly.” To write is to reflect the radical unknown, the proverbial “other.” This idea explains Kuzmin’s frequent use of the image of “twins,” one dead, and the other alive, but both engrossed in the mystical process of creation, and his interest in the relationship between the prototype and the “copy” that becomes an original in its own right, and the author and his work. The metaphor of writing as a mirror that persists throughout Kuzmin’s body of work draws attention to its own metaphoric nature, suggesting another pairing of equal opposites: the word and the image, which are as connected as they are distinct and “unearthly” to each other. Kuzmin’s clarity is a meditation on this essential relationship.

³²⁵ Kuzmin, “Cheshuia v nevode,” *PE* 3:371-372. Kuzmin elaborates that each art form seeks its opposite. Music, as the most amorphous, chaotic and vague of the arts, seeks its most exacting and “nearly mathematical” complement in logic and philosophy. Unlike the Symbolists, Kuzmin—a musician— does not privilege music, although he does consider it chaotic. He writes that as the most amorphous of all arts, music is attracted to the least vague and most “clear” in the traditional sense of the word: philosophy and logic. Neither has the type of clarity that Kuzmin has in mind.

Chapter 4
Speech as ‘Epic Gesture’:
Osip Mandelshtam’s Response to the Debate on Clarity

Osip Mandelshtam’s Critical Response to Ivanov, Kuzmin and Bely

In 1910 Osip Mandelshtam was nineteen years old and not yet a published poet. His contribution to the debate on clarity (in 1920s and again the mid-1930s) was a reflection on the crisis of Symbolism as a fact of literary history. From the beginning, he understood this concept not only as a specific approach to the relationship between the word and the image, but also a representation of the preceding generation’s effort to create a poetics of knowledge. Mandelshtam’s approach to clarity should be understood in the context of his relationship to the poetics of Ivanov, Kuzmin and Bely.

As the acrimonious exchange between the Symbolists and Kuzmin unfolded on the pages of *Trudy i Dni*, a group of young poets who eventually called themselves the “Acmeists” began to define itself against Symbolist theory. Mandelshtam had frequented Ivanov’s Tower since 1909, but by 1912 he became a core participant in the Acmeist movement. While his poems of 1909—1912 reflect the influence of Symbolism in general, and Ivanov’s theories and poetry in particular, his 1913 manifesto “The Morning of Acmeism” contains an overt polemic with his mentor: he objects to Ivanov’s “dubious *a realibus ad realiora*,” and pledges allegiance to the principle of identity, and concrete reality rather than symbolic insinuations of higher orders of existence.³²⁶ In the same essay, as Mandelshtam distances himself from Ivanov’s theories, he

³²⁶ Oleg Lekmanov, *Kniga ob akmeizme i drugie raboty* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 2000), 57-59. Lekmanov writes on Mandelshtam as Ivanov’s opponent in “Motivy esseistiki Viacheslava Ivanova v tvorchestvom soznanii Mandel’shtama” (119-118) and “Stikhotvorenie Mandel’shtama ‘Kazino’ kak manifest i nekrolog,” (463-472).

appears to espouse Kuzmin's "beautiful clarity," positing the clearly anti-Symbolist idea of logic as "the domain of the unexpected," and insisting on the apparently concrete "here and now," rather than an abstract "there."³²⁷ In this essay, however, he also pays him the dubious compliment of likening him to Pushkin's Salieri: the perfect draftsman who has "measured harmony with algebra." Mandelshtam's 1916 essay "On Contemporary Poetry" encapsulates the ambivalence of his response to Kuzmin's poetics.³²⁸

It is sweet to read the classic poet living among us, to feel Goethe's fusion of "form" and "content," to become convinced that our soul is not a substance made of metaphysical wadding, but an easy and gentle Psyche. Kuzmin's poems are not only easy to remember, they seem almost to recall themselves [...] However, Kuzmin's "Clarism" has its dangerous side. It seems that the kind of good weather one finds especially in his later verses can't really exist.³²⁹

Mandelshtam praises Kuzmin's brilliant poetic diction and credits him with replacing ponderous Symbolist abstractions with a graceful and luminous "Psyche." He associates Kuzmin's work with classicism as unity of form and content, and writes that his poetry is not only easy to memorize, but presents itself as a memory. Mikhail Gasparov mentions that in this passage

Lekmanov's essay "Osip Mandel'shtam i Viacheslav Ivanov" details instances of intertextuality between the two poets' works: O. Lekmanov and E.V. Gluhkova, "Osip Mandel'shtam i Viacheslav Ivanov," in V. E. Bagno, A.B. Shishkin, et al. (eds.), *Bashnia Viacheslava Ivanova i kul'tura serebriannogo veka* (St. Petersburg: Filologicheskii fakul'tet S.-Peterburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2006), 173-179.

³²⁷ The problem of Acmeist adaptations and interpretations of Kuzmin's poetics has been treated by critics starting with V.M. Zhirmunsky and his 1916 essay "Those who Overcame Symbolism" ["Preodolevshie simvolizm"], and more recently, Iuri Freidin's "Mikhail Kuzmin i Osip Mandel'shtam: vliianie i otkliki," in G. A. Morev (ed.), *Mikhail Kuzmin i russkaia kul'tura XX veka* (Leningrad: Muzei Anny Akhmatovoi v Fontannom dome), 28-32; Lekmanov, "K voprosy o Kuzmine i akmeizme: summiruiia obshcheizvestnoe." *Kniga ob akmeizme*, 45-50.

³²⁸ Freidin provides a careful analysis of Mandelshtam's references to Kuzmin. Mandelshtam praises Kuzmin in "O sovremennoi poezii" (1916) and "O prirode slova" (1920-1922). He takes a very critical stance toward him in "Grotesk" (1922) and "Buria i natisk" (1923). "Mikhail Kuzmin i Osip Mandel'shtam: vliianie i otkliki," in G.A. Morev (ed.), *Mikhail Kuzmin i russkaia kul'tura XX veka* (Leningrad: Muzei Anny Akhmatovoi v Fontannom dome), 28-32.

³²⁹ Mandel'shtam, "O sovremennoi poezii," *PSS* II: 42-45, 44.

Classicism signifies the return of the eternal, in contrast to the personal.³³⁰ But as Mandelshtam praises Kuzmin for his Classical memory, he also criticizes his “Clarism” as artificially perfect. In later essays he also accuses him of creating a false impression of Russian prosody’s “premature aging” (“Sturm und Drang”), and of “concealing stylization” in the corners of his mouth (“Grotesk”).³³¹ He implies that Kuzmin’s “eternal” prototype is a fabrication, in other words, that the work of memory has not really been done. In his view, Kuzmin’s eternally recurring Edenic original is a fabrication, always situated beyond history and historical memory. Its perfection detaches it from the historical reality of language and thus diminishes it.

The problem of the prototype emerges in Mandelshtam’s criticism of Ivanov. When in 1923 he writes on the maître’s concept of a hierophantic, “sacred” language, he rejects the notion of the sacred original and claims that the imported scholarly Greek of “Byzantine monks” was never superior to the Russian vulgate.³³² Like Kuzmin, who considered Russian translations to be superior to the original Greek prayers, he objects to the idea of an “original,” endowed with spiritual authority, used to validate the present utterance, and available only to the select few. Mandelshtam reminds the reader that the evolution of Russian literary tradition is measured by the degree to which it adopted the “worldly” vulgate. “It’s untrue that Latin rests within Russian speech, untrue that Hellas [...] rests there [...] Russian itself rests there and only Russian itself

³³⁰ M. Gasparov, “Osip Mandel’shtam: tri ego poetiki.” *O Russkoi Poezii* (St. Petersburg: Akademia, 2001), 208.

³³¹ Mandel’shtam, “Grotesk,” “Buria i Natisk.” *Slovo i kul’tura*, 188, 209.

³³² In the context of European literary history, Dante set the precedent for Mandelshtam’s position. Dante’s views are quite complex, however. He does not reject the “original” languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. However, in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and *The Banquet* he proffers an impassioned defense of the vulgate. His *Commedia* is also a convincing argument in its favor.

[...] Give us the vulgate—we don't want the Latin Bible."³³³ Irina Rodnianskaia demonstrates that this essay is a point-by-point response to Ivanov's "Our Language" ["Nash iazyk"] (1918-1920).³³⁴ She observes that Ivanov believes discontinuity to be the root of cultural evils, while for Mandelshtam interruption is consonant with the nature of language.³³⁵ In another essay Mandelshtam defines Ivanov's tendency toward archaisms in terms of his "inability to think relatively, in other words, to compare names."³³⁶ This inability blinds the poet to the significance of difference, transformation, context, and explains his effort to resurrect the prototype in the present.

Ivanov privileges the origin and the original and understands them as identical emblems of knowledge beyond history. Kuzmin, conversely, views the original as an alternative to history and, as he states in the essays on Gluck, the freedom to forget about historical origins. Knowledge is nonetheless always present in his writing as an emblem of something that he commands, and also as that from which he is free. Mandelshtam does not dismiss the idea of origin like Kuzmin, nor does he elevate it to the status of a truth, like Ivanov. He understands and incorporates it into his writing as no-knowledge, and so a rupture in a continuity. The original happens post-rupture.

³³³ Mandel'shtam, "'Vulgata,'" *PSS* 2:140-142. As in English, the Russian word "vul'gata" refers to the Latin translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Either Mandelshtam made a mistake, or he meant to refer to the vernacular Russian as the "new" Latin.

³³⁴ Irina Rodnianskaia, *Dvizhenie literatury*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2006), 1:253-268. John Malmstad has also contributed an important essay on Mandelshtam's polemic with Ivanov. He discusses Mandelshtam's "Silentium" as a response to Ivanov's "The Precepts of Symbolism" in: "Mandel'shtam's 'Silentium': A Poet's Response to Ivanov" in Paul Bushkovitch (ed.), *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher* (New Haven: Yale Russian and East European Publications, 1986), 236-252.

³³⁵ Rodnianskaia, *Dvizhenie literatury*, 254-255.

³³⁶ Mandel'shtam, "Buria i natisk," *PSS* 2:128-139, 132.

In the essay “On the Nature of the Word [“O prirode slova”]” (1921) as Mandelstham polemicizes with Symbolism, he writes against the idea of progress and resorts to Bergson’s philosophy to replace the abhorrent principle of causation with the more flexible principle of connection. He recalls Bergson’s “fan” as a visual representation of a connective “system.” Like Kuzmin, he prefers the spatial paradigm to Ivanov’s temporal model with its culmination in the distant “origin” as cause and truth. As space comes to represent freedom from causation, the causeless word becomes spacious: neither the meaning nor the sound prevails as the definitive origin. The coexistence of the two is the reason Mandelshtam famously states in this essay that the word is already an image, and a symbol.³³⁷ Polemicizing with Ivanov, the poet also suggests that the word is “Hellenic” not because it may or may not derive from ancient Greek, but because like ancient Greek, it conceptualizes the word as simultaneously being and action: “The Hellenistic nature of the Russian language can be identified with its existential being. The word in the Hellenistic sense is active flesh that resolves into event.”³³⁸ Mandelshtam goes on to say that the event is “the conscious environment of a person with implements [*utvar*] instead of indifferent objects, the transformation of these objects into implements, the humanization of the surrounding world, the warming of it with the subtlest teleological warmth.”³³⁹ Any vulgate is “Hellenic,” as long as it accords with its purpose. Any language, in other words, is original, if it is both the dwelling of the mind, and the “implement” that creates this dwelling: both discrete or causeless, and continuous or teleological.

³³⁷ Mandel’shtam, “O prirode slova,” *PSS* 2:64-81.

The observation that Mandelshtam understands the word as a metaphor belongs to Irina Paperno. Irina Paperno, “O prirode poeticheskogo slova: bogoslovskie istochniki spora Mandel’shtama s simvolizmom,” *Literaturnoe obozrenie* 1 (1991): 29-36, 33.

³³⁸ Mandel’shtam, “O prirode slova,” *PSS* 2:67-68.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

Mandelstam understands Classicism as a period in the history of poetic language when the vulgate discovers itself as an original.³⁴⁰ This discovery takes place through rupture—a forgetting that must be compensated by the effort to remember and the recovery of the lost but as something new and transformed. In the essay “Word and Culture” [“Slovo i kul'tura”] (1921) the poet declares freedom from “the weight of memory” [“my svobodny ot gruzha vospominanii”], and compares poetry to the plough that turns the soil of time [“poeziia—plug, vzryvaiushchii vremia”]. He goes on to define Classicism: “But there are eras when humanity, not content with the present day, yearns like a ploughman, thirsts for the virgin soil of time. Revolution in art inevitably leads to Classicism.”³⁴¹ Within the parameters of a project preoccupied with purpose, Classicism as “the virgin soil of time” is always a new beginning.

This position resembles Kuzmin's, who also views “classical Psyche” as free from causation. For him, liberation takes place when the magic mirror of art reflects the individual as a universal, without robbing him of his individuality. Kuzmin elevates this process to the status of a ritual. But while for him it is an end in itself, Mandelstam views it as the beginning. Rejecting Kuzmin's stylization as not open-ended enough, he seeks the origin in the unknown itself. Paradoxically, continuity emerges from forgetting. The original that appears thus incorporates the unfamiliar—in its form as an ancient or a foreign tongue for example—without depriving it of its unfamiliarity. The spoken word—Tyutchev's “a thought once uttered”—becomes an original in its own right by virtue of a relationship first to the fundamental unknown from which it separated, and second, to the “other” as a concrete, historical entity. Mandelstam's approach

³⁴⁰ Mandelstam's poetry is usually considered “classical” especially in his first two books *Stone* and *Tristia*. See, for example, the aforementioned observation by Mikhail Gasparov, regarding Mandelstam's approach to Kuzmin's classicism as reflecting his own. Below, I refer to Lidiya Ginzburg's discussion of Mandelstam's classicism in *O lirike*.

³⁴¹ Mandel'shtam, “Slovo i kul'tura,” *PSS* 2: 49-55, 51.

merges Kuzmin's universal but detached subject with the Symbolists' sense of civic obligation.³⁴²

Mandelstam's response and criticism of Andrei Bely further elucidates his specific understanding of the poetic logos and the process whereby it obtains its universal quality, the role of forgetting in his interpretation of the open-ended and vulnerable poetic word, and the relationship between the speaker and the word. Moreover, it pertains to Mandelshtam's understanding of clarity as a specific concept used by his teachers. His engagement with Bely's work is more complex and more extensive than his response to Ivanov and Kuzmin. While he launched some of his most strident criticism against Bely, he may have envisioned him as his ideal interlocutor, and represented him in his own poetry as a larger-than-life figure of a paradigmatic poet.³⁴³ In 1935 Rudakov quotes Mandelshtam saying about Bely: "We see craftsmanship not where others do." ["My ne v tom, chto drugie, vidim masterstvo."]³⁴⁴ Mandelshtam's use of the pronoun "we" in reference to another poet with whom he believes to have shared a creative purpose is unique. Since Mandelshtam's response to Bely is extensive, I focus on an instance of textual overlap between the two poets' work and on a specific critical essay—both of which pertain directly to the theme of clarity.

³⁴² Lidiya Ginzburg writes that Mandelshtam turns away from the subjectivism of the Symbolists in favor of classicism, which he treats as a synthesis of various classical styles ranging from antiquity to St. Petersburg Empire, French seventeenth century and the Russian eighteenth century. She mentions that he does not stylize, but synthesizes in the effort to understand them historically, and that by the 1920s he transforms these idioms into the author's speech. Lidiya Ginzburg, *O lirike* (Moscow: Intrada, 1997), 340-343.

³⁴³ Andrew Kahn, "Andrei Belyi, Dante and "Golubye Glaza i Goriachaia Lobnaia Kost"" Mandel'shtam's Later Poetics and the Image of the Raznochinets. *The Russian Review* 53.1 (Jan. 1994), 22-35, 26.

³⁴⁴ D.M. Klimova, ed. *Ezhegodnik rukopisnogo otdela Pushkinskogo doma na 1993 god: materialy ob O.E. Mandel'shtame* (St. Petersburg: Gumanitarnoe agentsvo "Akademicheskii proekt," 1997), 67. Rudakov writes about this in a letter dated 6/20/1935.

Bely's *Glossolalia* (1917) is a lengthy prose poem that resembles an etymological dictionary, a shamanic manual, and a fictional history of language all at once. Mandelshtam uses the word "glossolalia" once, in the essay "Word and Culture" (1921). The scholar Vladimir Feshchenko believes that while the presence of this term in the two poets' texts indicates similar interests, it is coincidental. Yet in 1921, when the two texts appeared side by side in the almanac *Dragon*, Mandelshtam served as one of its editors. The almanac contained poetry and prose by many participants of Gumilev's "Poets' Guild," some prominent Symbolists and Mikhail Kuzmin.³⁴⁵ Mandelshtam would have read Bely's text closely and likely used this word in his essay with Bely in mind.

Bely's *Glossolalia* varies the theme—previously featured in the essay "Orpheus"—of poetic language as knowledge catalyzed by insight into origins. It further explicates the idea of the Orphic symbol as a tautological subversion of the visible. The text begins with its own version of the genesis myth, whereby the speech act creates the world as well as the word. Enunciation is equated with Rudolf Steiner's theosophical practice of *eurythmy*—a dance-like performance that aspires to become "visible speech." But for Bely speech is a kind of dance, rather than dance a kind of speech. The text also explores the idea of the historical origins of languages, applying comparative and fictional etymologies, and referencing ancient Greek, Hebrew, and Sanskrit languages in addition to Russian, German and other modern languages. Most of all, Bely is interested in the origins of words themselves, because their original mythic significance and power resides in their "inner forms." The linguist Alexander Potebnya's concept of the "inner form" represents the trace of the word's development in time, or the "trail" left by the thought that created it, such as the Russian word for "eye" or "*oko*" that inheres in the later

³⁴⁵ E. Etkind, "Krizis simvolizma i akmeizm." *Tam, vnutri: o russkoi poezii XX veka* (St.Petersburg: "Maksima", 1996), 25-49, 44-45.

word for “window” or “*okno*.” Bely interprets this concept his own way. He believes that the “inner form” appears to the individual and collective imagination as a “motivation” of a phenomenon, then as myth, and eventually as religious belief.³⁴⁶

The word that knows its origin is the source or origin of a future world: its “embryo.” As such, it aspires to bridge the distinction between the world as fact and the world as fiction.³⁴⁷ The poet’s “shamanic” effort should be viewed in the context of ideas that figured in such earlier works as the essay “The Magic of Words,” where Bely emphasized the powers of language to subordinate chaos, and described words as the “essence” not only of human nature, but of nature as such. The poet who can harness this power mends the incongruent relationship between the self and the world.³⁴⁸ Feshchenko suggests that Mandelshtam’s notion of the “heroic era of the word,” likewise from his “Word and Culture,” would have appealed to Bely, who views the endeavor to revive myth by “remembering” the origins of words and “enunciating” them into life as heroic.³⁴⁹

Bely believed that the word’s power resides in its sound as the magical link between time and space, a concrete demonstration of causality, and the key to transformation. The “heroic” task of *Glossolalia* is to animate the soundscape of words’ “inner forms.”³⁵⁰ This can only

³⁴⁶ Feshchenko, *Laboratoriia logosa*, 160-161. Also Paperno, “O prirode poeticheskogo slova,” 29-30. She references Bely’s 1907 essay “The Meaning of Art” [“Smysl iskusstva”].

³⁴⁷ V. Feshchenko calls Bely’s essay “Zhezl Aarona” a study in the embryology of the word. Feshchenko, *Laboratoriia logosa*, 170.

³⁴⁸ The notion that there is a space of non-correspondence between language and reality plays an ambiguous role in Bely’s language theory. In the essay “The Magic of Words” Bely writes he writes that the very purpose of art, and therefore language, is to create objects of knowledge. For Bely this means that the word and the world are identical. Yet the idea that mind is the creator of the very objects it seeks to know could be interpreted in exactly the opposite way haunts his writing, especially his fiction, and represents the premise of his novel *Petersburg*, for example. A. Belyi, “Magiia slov.” *Simvolizm kak miroponimanie*, 135.

³⁴⁹ Mandel’shtam, “Slovo i kul’tura,” 53.

³⁵⁰ Belyi, “Magiia slov,” 132.

happen when the corporeal world has been dissolved in sound, in other words, subordinated to language.³⁵¹ This may appear paradoxical, considering the emphasis that the text places on the idea of the words' origin within the body, and its recourse to the figure of the eurythmic dancer. But as mentioned in the context of Bely's essay "Orpheus," the material and the visible is present only as the renunciation of itself. Indeed, the opening chapter of *Glossolalia* describes image, and metaphor as a "word-image," as the process of the destruction of sound.

Concrete physical reality and its visual and verbal representation are meaningful only insofar as they are expressions of thought, because thought is the expression of the divine Self: "Gestures are the youthful sounds of as yet unformed thoughts embedded in my body; the exact same thing that is occurring at the moment only under my frontal bone will happen throughout my body in the course of time."³⁵² The achievement of Steiner's *eurythmy* is its ability to transform the body into thought and the medium of sound: "The imprint on eurythmy of free clarity [...] and dance; the fleet-footed dancer is he who clothed the flow of thought in the ornaments of rhythm [...]." It is not by chance that the "free clarity" ["vol'naia iasnost'"] of the dancer evokes Kuzmin's clarity as "police precinct" ["politseiskii uchastok iasnosti"] with an opposed image. Reason and form, *ratio* and the body, which in Bely's opinion Kuzmin advocated, are "limits" that must be overcome. The "freedom" of his dancer is contingent upon her body becoming an expression and sign of the invisible. As an extension and representation, she, too, is an "icon" in the manner of the mask of Orpheus.

³⁵¹ For Bely time, not space, was the vessel of the sacred. Already in the essay "The Forms of Art" ["Formy iskusstva"] (1902), he defined poetry as "the bridge from the spatial to the temporal" ["most, perekinytyi ot prostranstva k vremeni"] and called it a "vent through which the spirit of music enters spatial forms" ["otdushina, propuskaiushchaia v iskusstvo prostranstvennykh form dukh muzyki"]. Belyi, "Formy iskusstva." *Simvolizm kak miroponimanie*, 91, 98.

³⁵² Andrei Belyi, *Glossolaliia: poema o zvuke*. (Moscow: Evidentis, 2002). 10.

In the central chapters of the text an entry on “clarity” or “*iasnost*” not only interprets the “inner form” of this concept in several languages, but presents it as the exemplary “inner form,” and a symbolic representation of glossolalia as the core concept of the text.³⁵³ Bely traces the word “*iasnost*” from the root “ser,” “Serios,” or Sirius, and the Greek “*hélíos*,” or the sun.³⁵⁴ He improvises on the sound “ser”: “ser-as” is summer and heat; and ser-enus is clear; the sounds *Ser-ios* is the name of a star; it is Sirius, that is blazing with rays: a distant sun [...] [“ser-as”—*leto i zhar*; *i ser-enus est’ iasnyi*; *zvuki Ser-ios*—imenovanie zvezdy; *eto*—Sirius, *chto pylaet luchami*: *dalekoe solntse ...*]. He associates the sound “ser” with “swar” and the Slavic “iadr”:

[...] the *core* of solar activity (*raz-zor*) is the root of the universe, it is the radix; and that radix is crimson; “Sas” is the name of Zeus; “ias” clear and ash, a tree dedicated to the sun; and “iasis” is Iason (Zeus’s son); and from that the later sound “ias” means to us not only clarity; it also means “holiness”: “iasis” is holy (is clear); “iassis,” “iaso,” “iasos” denoting a shrine (or light); and “iasis” is beauty (what is light is beautiful); and *Iason* in search of the Golden Fleece.

... *iadro* solnechnykh deistvii (*raz-zor*)—eto koren’ vselennoi, on—radix, i radix tot—riadnyi; “Sas”—imenovanie Zevsa; “ias” *ias-en i iasen’*, derevo, posviashchennoe solntsu; i “iasis” est’ iasen’ (syn Zevsa); i ottogo-to pozdnee zvuk “ias” oboznachetne tol’ko nam iasnost’: oboznachet i “sviatost’”: “iasis” est’ sviataia (est’ iasnaia); “iasis,” “iaso,” “iasos” oboznacheniiia sviatyni (il’ sveta); i “iasis”—krasota (chto svetlo, to—krasivo); i ustremlennyi k Runu Zolotomu—*Iazon*.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Belyi, *Glossolaliia*, 25-29. As an origin myth in its own right, the pays special attention to the first sentence of Genesis: “In the beginning God created heaven and earth,” in the original Hebrew, and German translation. This is, no doubt, a jab at Kuzmin, whose “On Beautiful Clarity” references the biblical origin myth in order to emphasize the idea of distinction. Bely’s text revisits it in order to underscore that the word is union and co-creation of the self and the world.

³⁵⁴ The myth of the sun interested Bely as early as the 1900s, as member of the intellectual group the “Argonauts.” He also wrote several poems about Jason and the quest for the Golden Fleece, equated with the sun. He references the myth in an important series of essays “Crisis of Life,” “Crisis of Thought,” and “Crisis of Culture” (1916-1917), in his *Notes of an Eccentric* and in numerous other texts. *Glossolalia* stands apart from all of them in one important way: it elucidates the connection between this myth and Bely’s concept of clarity.

³⁵⁵ Belyi, *Glossolaliia*, 44-45.

Clarity is the origin: “the root” of the universe. The inner form of the word “clear” or “*iasnyi*” is “*ia*,” present in such Russian words as *iasen*’ (ash tree), and in the ancient Greek name Iasón (Jason). It indicates and “contains” the sun as the expression of the divine Self. It also represents the intersection between literature, myth, and the sacred.³⁵⁶ Once again, the sound “*ia*,” and its meaning as “self” represents Bely’s tautological sign: both an extension and a representation of the divine Self. Since this sound concept signifies and effectuates the union of a multiplicity of selves and the divine Self, it encapsulates glossolalia as Bely understands it.

In sum, Bely proclaims the primacy of the invisible and of sound as its immediate expression, and views glossolalia as a plurality united in the one. His symbol is one based in a tautology wherein the material and the visual signifier leads to the invisible and the singular signified. But while the narrator of his poem engages in interpretation and elaboration or improvisation on the esoteric meanings of the multiple language concepts that figure in the text, the reader relies on this exegetic “dance” in order to arrive at the destination—the knowledge that the narrator seeks to convey. It is not possible to gain insight into his ideas based on sound alone, but only based on the conceptual explanation and interpretation. For the reader, this creates another kind of “sign,” one that is divided into the image and the narrator’s singular conceptual interpretation of this image.

Mandelstam mentions “glossolalia” just once, in the following passage from the essay “Word and Culture” and treats this concept as a metaphor that addresses the state of the poetic language of his time.

These days glossolalia is taking place as a kind of phenomenon. In a sacred frenzy, poets speak the language of all times, of all cultures. Nothing is impossible. As the dying man’s

³⁵⁶ Feshchenko, *Laboratoriia logosa*, 167.

Feshchenko discusses Bely’s enthusiasm for *imiaslavie*, the Russian interpretation of Hesychast mysticism that obviously informs the ideas above.

room is open to everyone, so the door of the old world is wide open before the crowd. Suddenly, everything has become common property. Go ahead and take it. Everything is accessible [...] The word became not a seven-stop, but a thousand-stop flute, suddenly animated by the breath of all ages. In glossolalia, the most striking thing is that the speaker does not know the language he speaks. He speaks a completely unknown language. And it seems to everyone that he speaks Greek or Chaldean. Something quite the reverse of erudition. Modern poetry, for all its complexity and inner sophistication, is naïve [...].³⁵⁷

Unlike Bely's text, wherein the singular narrator interprets the singular meaning embedded in many tongues, Mandelshtam's "glossolalia" is inherently pluralistic. It is available to anyone, and represents the heritage of "all ages." This universally available phenomenon has a specific relationship to knowledge. The speaker thinks she remembers something, but in fact she does not. She thinks she speaks "Greek or Chaldean," but memory is only the form of the new. She therefore does not, to quote Ivanov, "invent the new and obtain the old," but invents the old and obtains the new. Spontaneous loss of knowledge, rather than its conscious attainment invigorates language, allowing the idioms of the past to obtain new form and content. Unlike Bely, then, Mandelshtam does not view the origin as validation, nor is he interested in multiplicity as a representation of a singular principle or a singular meaning. The reader of his glossolalia would need to construe the meaning for herself, without exegetical guidance. This means that the moment of the enrichment of language comes when meaning is forgotten, and that knowledge as understanding, insight, or interpretation is a secondary phenomenon. Finally, unlike Bely's tautological relationship between the self and the Self, and his emphasis on the word's identity with being, Mandelshtam's glossolalia assumes the kind of relationship between the speaker and the word, whereby identity implies a non-correspondence.

³⁵⁷ Mandel'shtam, "Slovo i kul'tura," 53-54.

At the same time as Mandelshtam implicitly dismisses the idea of origin as validation of the present, he validates his contemporaries' participation in a "glossolalia" in his own sense of the word, as the "opposite of erudition." Kuzmin's "as if recalled" classical Psyche, Bely's shamanic narrator, and numerous other voices take part in this phenomenon regardless of their specific attitude toward the word they speak. It takes place as an event in the life of a language, regardless of the intention and the interpretation of the speaker.

In spite of his very different perspective on the role of the past in the present life of a language, there is no evidence that Mandelshtam disliked Bely's poem. His highly negative review of Bely's novel *The Notes of an Eccentric* [*Zapiski chudaka*] (1922), however, engages the problem of clarity as it figures in *Glossolalia*, and further elucidates Mandelshtam's perspective on the purpose of the poetic logos. The novel is a theosophical story of Orphic initiation, intended as a preface to a never completed multi-volume epic ["*epopeia*"] of the "self." In the preface to this preface, Bely introduces the first-person narrator of the text as his own double. In the afterward he refers to this epic as a satire on individual experience, especially a mystical one. Now the reader finds out that the protagonist falls pray to a "mania grandiosa," the mental illness of Nietzsche, Schuman and Hölderlin, which the narrator of the preface claims to have exorcised, unlike the three great minds he references, by writing the novel. The transition from the individual and grandiose "self" to the "supra-subjective 'I'" ["nad-individual'noe 'Ia'"] and "objective" reality is achieved not by the protagonist, but by the "author," who satirizes his protagonist's and double's grandiosity, and therefore transcends it without ever abandoning the first-person narrative voice.³⁵⁸ The premise of the narrative echoes the concept of clarity as it appears in *Glossolalia*. The multiplicity that merges with the divine Self in the poem appears as

³⁵⁸ At least according to the preface, both Bely and Kuzmin view clarity as the passage from the self, to the self as object. They differ only in how they interpret the object itself.

the narrator's multiple "selves" in the novel and is echoed by the multiple genres—the novel, the epic and the satire—that the text evokes. While in the prose poem a single speaker interprets many languages as one, in the satirical epic the author claims to have the singular objective point of view on a plurality of selves.

As in *Glossolalia*, clarity in the *Notes* is associated with the loss of the body and emerges in the context of an extended polemic with Kuzmin. As Bely's protagonist experiences Orphic initiation, he undergoes a metaphoric decapitation, so that his skull transforms into a cupola, and the cupola into the whole universe. As this happens, he exclaims: "No: 'I' and 'the world' —have crossed in me. The union with the cosmos was accomplished in me; the thoughts of the world condensed to the shoulders: one's "I" is one's own only to the shoulders: the dome of heaven rises above the shoulders. I lifted my own skull from my shoulders, like a scepter, with my hand." ["Net: "Ia" i "mir"—pereseclis' vo mne. Soedinenie s kosmosom sovershilos' vo mne; mysli mira sgustilis' do plech: lish' do plech "Ia" svoi sobstvennyi: s plech podnimaetsia kupol nebesnyi. Ia, sobstvennyi cherep sniav s plech, podnimaiu, kak skipetr, rukoiu moeiu."]³⁵⁹ The narrator responds to Kuzmin's "On Beautiful Clarity," where the author writes: "in the life of every human being there arrive moments when [...] he will suddenly say [...] "I—and the

³⁵⁹ Andrei Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, 2 vols. (Moscow, Berlin: Gelikon, 1922), 2:114. The title of this chapter of the novel references Ivanov's 1904 poem "Fio, Ergo Non Sum," where the speaker asks repeatedly "where am I?"

world.”³⁶⁰ In Bely’s view, the body as the site of “worldly thoughts” creates the illusion of separation between the “self” and the “world” as subject and object.³⁶¹

Mandelstam gave the novel an exceptionally bad review.³⁶² He attributes the text’s failure to the narrator’s self-indulgence, and attacks the author for his “literary vanity” [“literaturnaia samobliublennost’”] and his desire “to expose himself in the fourth, fifth and sixth

³⁶⁰ Bely polemicized with these words in 1910, when in the beginning of his essay “The Magic of Words” [“*Magiia slov*”] he wrote: “My “self” does not exist separately from the surroundings; nor does the world exist separately from my “self”; “I” and the “world” appear only in the process of merging together in sound.” A. Belyi, “*Magiia slov.*” *Simvolizm kak miroponimanie*, 131.

³⁶¹ In the essay “‘Orfei rasterzannyi’ i nasledie orfizma” Lena Silard discusses the trope of dismemberment and decapitation in Bely’s novel as a major Orphic theme (79). Lena Silard. ‘Orfei rasterzannyi’ i nasledie orfizma” *Germetizm i germeneytika* (St. Petersburg: Iz-vo Ivana Limbakha, 2002), 54-101.

³⁶² It was exceptionally badly received by Kuzmin as well. He included a scathing review of *Notes of an Eccentric* in the same collection as his essays on Gluck. The review, entitled “Dreamers” [“*Mechtateli*”], describes the novel as a site of gory violence.

“The epic of “Self” [...] is, of course, an event in literature, and a tragic one at that. Never before has the chemistry lab of creativity been stripped so bare, never before has formal inventiveness, metaphysical dialectics, and psychological self-analysis been so acute; all available means were put to use. Nearly the Battle of Leipzig that, in my opinion, has been lost. Spiritual fragmentation and whirling [“*mel’kanie*”] render the brilliance of Bely’s chemical art nearly uncanny <...> the chemical amalgamation of life’s elements fails to create a living being. Not by chance, Kuzmin likens Bely’s writing to a homunculus—an entity that lacks wholeness. In his vocabulary the adjective “uncanny” and references to the “dispersed state” [“*razdroblennost’*”] of the author and his prose are antonyms of “clarity” as an image of organic integrity. In the previous chapter I quote Kuzmin’s observations on seeing first without and then with spectacles. With the spectacles he sees a disjointed, de-mystified world, and compares this kind of vision to seeing with the devil’s shard of a broken mirror in the eye. The entry dates to 1934, but evidently the ideas themselves date to a much earlier period. In his review he suggests that while the ghost of “spectacled” reasoning haunts Bely’s writing overall, it is especially present in the pivotal space of his concept of “*iasnost’*,” as it fails to deliver on its promise of a mystical revelation. Parodying Bely’s fascination with dynamism, he describes the futility of his “gesture”: “Bely did not leap beyond literature, and, contrary to his assurances, dives not into “nothing,” but still only into literature.” Kuzmin likens the desire to create an organic whole from rational thought to an alchemy experiment gone wrong, and to an ego-fueled Napoleonic battle. (Kuzmin, “*Mechtateli*,” *PE* 3:608-609.)

dimension” [“pokazat’ sebia v chetvertom, piatom, shestom izmerenii”].³⁶³ He observes that the text unfolds in a historical vacuum and culminates in a self-satisfied, deracinated theosophic commune in Switzerland. Contemptuous of Bely’s mystical aspirations, Mandelshtam describes theosophy as the “knit sweater-vest of a degenerate religion” [“viazanaia fufaika vyrozhdaiushcheisia religii”]. But most of all, he abhors the novel’s style, especially its conflation of prose and lyric modalities. He observes that the text is almost in hexameter and that this lends it the “crude and repulsive” musicality of a “prose poem” [“grubaia, otvratitel’naia dlia slukha muzykal’nost’ stikhotvoreniia v proze (vsia kniga napisana pochtii gekzametrom) ...]. It is neither prose nor poetry, but “half-verse” like a “schoolboy’s diary.” In this context he provides his own definition of prose as “asymmetrical: its movement—is the movement of a verbal mass—the movement of a herd, complex and rhythmic in its irregularity; true prose is disparity, discord, polyphony, counterpoint.” [“Proza assimetrichna: ee dvizheniia—dvizheniia slovesnoi massy—dvizhenie stada, slozhnoe i ritmichnoe v svoei nepravil’nosti; nastoiashchaia proza, razlad, mnogogolosie, kontrapunkt ...”].³⁶⁴ Prose—especially one that strives to be of epic scope—comprises “many voices,” and cannot be tyrannically reduced to a single perspective. An inherently polyphonic linguistic mass rejects the superimposed vector of a single individual’s will. Mandelshtam cites *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and *War and Peace* as examples of prose “epics” that respect the polyphonic nature of the genre.³⁶⁵ *War and Peace* is a particularly

³⁶³Mandel’shtam, “Andrei Belyi: Zapiski chudaka.” *Slovo i kul’tura* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1987), 254-256.

The difference in Kuzmin’s and Mandelshtam’s criticism is telling. Kuzmin draws historical parallels, such as the comparison with Napoleon, in order to underscore the author’s self-aggrandizement and the anti-artistic nature of the battle he seeks to fight in the pages of his novel. Mandelshtam, conversely, believes the author has lost touch with history. This was the criticism he launched at Kuzmin as well.

³⁶⁴Mandel’shtam, “Andrei Belyi: Zapiski chudaka.” *Slovo i kul’tura*, 256.

³⁶⁵Mandel’shtam, “Literaturnaia Moskva: rozhdenie fabuly,” *PSS* 2:106-111, here 108.

poignant example: Tolstoy depicts Napoleon as a megalomaniac whose personal insignificance is the more conspicuous the greater he believes himself to be.³⁶⁶ The French Emperor's illusion of grandeur blinds him to the fact that he merely fulfills his mission within the text. Earnest or satirical, Bely's effort to render the self "objective" amplifies the subject to such an extent that the subject leaves no room for the interlocutor. The absence of perspective creates a redundancy rather than a tautology.

Mandelstam references clarity in "Word and Culture," the essay in which he also discusses glossolalia. A discussion of his treatment of this concept specifically is the theme of this chapter's next section. Here, it is important to point out that while for all of the poets I discuss in my work, the term "clarity" pertains to the relationship of the subject and the object, the word and the image, and the self and the world, for Bely and Mandelshtam it also involves the problem of the one and the many. For Bely multiplicity is first and foremost a metaphysical, mystical concept. He seeks to reconcile the many in the one "objective" Self. In *Glossolalia*, a plurality of languages is interpreted in the single voice of the narrator, who knows, remembers and understands them all. In the *Notes*, the author-figure claims to have transcended his own double and rendered the troubled, individual self "objective." For Bely, the singular specific self must find its origin, common to all, and by virtue of this discovery obtain "objective" selfhood. He associates this idea with sound as the origin of the word and the world. But, as Mandelshtam points out, in Bely's texts the one eliminates the many. Bely's tautological, icon-like sign undermines the plurality of forms and replaces them with an abstraction. This is easily

³⁶⁶ Mandel'shtam and Kuzmin concur on this subject. Kuzmin's reference to Bely as Napoleon is discussed in footnote 54. By referencing Napoleon, obliquely or directly, both poets criticize Bely's neo-Romantic tendencies.

interpreted as the author's individual, psychological drive for self-realization: the very idea that Bely's text claims to have transcended.

Mandelstam's concept of the poetic word also implies a plurality, considered in a cultural and historical context that is conveyed by one voice, yet not reduced to a single interpretation. The comments to his review of Bely's novel contain an excerpt from the poet's diaries, which according to the editor complement his observations on the stylistic incongruence of the *Notes*, and which shed light on his concept of the word and its function in prose and poetry. Mandelstam describes prose as the "discontinuous sign of the continuous": "a story in prose is nothing but a discontinuous sign of the continuous [...] Semantic vocabulary units scattered here and there. An advance without finality. Freedom of arrangement. In prose it's always St. George's Day." ["prozaicheskii rasskaz ne chto inoe, kak preryvistyi znak nepreryvnogo ... Smyslovye slovarnye edinit'sy, razbegaiushchiesia po mestam. Neokonchatel'nost' etogo mesta perebezhki. Svoboda rasstanovok. V proze—vsegda Iur'ev den'."]³⁶⁷ Mandelstam views language as potentially incessant. Prose communicates this idea by virtue of an instability and arbitrariness of word choice, and the "intermittent" and fragmentary nature of the sign. As its distinct opposite, the lyric sign would emerge from linguistic infinity as a discrete and indivisible whole. It would, then, represent a totality that contains and integrates a multiplicity, potentially an incessancy of voices. Whereas in prose each individual word hints at the possibility of its own replacement ad infinitum, the poetic logos is irreplaceable. The lyric dramatizes memory as the process of loss and retrieval of a specific word.

³⁶⁷ Mandel'shtam, "Andrei Belyi: Zapiski chudaka," *Slovo i kul'tura*, 311.

Up until the sixteenth century, on St. George's day serfs could leave their owner for another one, if they so wished.

In spite of his often critical assessment of Bely's writing, Mandelshtam may have sympathized with Bely's vision of the sign itself. Both poets conceived of the word as a kind of tautology. But where Bely's tautological symbol leads away from the visible and palpable world, Mandelshtam's reorganizes, recreates and expands it. As both the dwelling and the instrument that creates it, his tautological word is dynamic. Paradoxically, such tautology implies a non-correspondence. This is particularly evident in the likewise simultaneously tautological and non-correspondent relationship between the speaker and the word.

In the essay "Osip Mandelshtam: The Poetics of the Incarnated Word" ["Osip Mandel'shtam: poetika voploshchennogo slova"] Yuri Lotman argues that Mandelshtam's "grandiose meta-poetic system" is based on a Christological "self-identification" with the word.³⁶⁸ The theme of incarnation, which is in fact prominent in the poet's oeuvre, receives a more nuanced interpretation than Lotman's analysis suggests. Mandelshtam's narrator frequently references misspeaking, interruption and forgetting as an indication of non-correspondence, rather than self-identification with the word. The tension between the speaker's described vulnerability and the words that capture and relate this vulnerability as a universal experience contributes to what Lotman proposes is the "poetics of incarnation."

The experience of speech captures the idea that universality and vulnerability are inextricable, because the body, with which the utterance is intimately connected, is its temporal, vulnerable and yet universal vehicle. Mandelshtam may have appreciated the beginning of Bely's *Glossolalia*, where the poet describes how the word originates in the mouth, and a world emerges from this basic action. Speech as an act that is both physical and always surpassing the limitations of the body is central in the poet's concept of the relationship between the self and the

³⁶⁸Iurii Lotman, "Osip Mandel'shtam: poetika voploshchennogo slova." In I.V. Abramets (ed.), *Klassitsizm i modernizm: sbornik statei* (Tartu: Ülikooli kirjastus, 1994), 195-217.

word. Mandelshtam's writing represents this idea. Furthermore, it also represents the interlocutor as the "other" to whom speech is directed, and without whom the "incarnation" of the word is not complete.

Lotman supports his concept of Mandelshtam's "poetics of enfleshment" with an analysis of the poem "To German Speech" ["K nemetskoi rechi"] (1932). Although this poem was written later than the writings discussed thus far, it illustrates my thesis too well for me to ignore it. Lotman discusses it because it evokes the Christological image of the grapevine. In the seventh of the poem's nine stanzas, Mandelshtam writes:

Another's speech will be my skin
and long before I dared be born
I was a letter, a grapevine line,
I was the book you're dreaming now.

Chuzhaia rech' mne obolochkoi
I mnogo prezhde, chem ia smel rodit'sia
Ia bukvoi byl, byl vinogradnoi strochkoi,
Ia knigoi byl, kotoraiia vam snitsia.³⁶⁹

Lotman notes that this verse evokes the beginning of John 15, where Jesus likens himself the "true vine." The Biblical concept of the word as origin is indeed central to this poem, but Lotman's observation is incomplete. The poem is dedicated to Boris Kuzin, who was part German and possessed a profound knowledge and understanding of German literature and language. Mandelshtam valued Kuzin's erudition and his talent as a friend and interlocutor. In the poem, he describes not his origin, but his desire to "originate" or be reborn in the foreign tongue of the interlocutor. The soundscape of the poem and its numerous references to German culture are—or rather "will be" the "skin" ["*obolochka*"] of his imagined new self.

Preceding the stanza that Lotman chooses to illustrate his example, the poet imagines himself and his interlocutors as Prussian officers from another century, who go to their grave as

³⁶⁹ Mandel'shtam, *PSS* 1:179.

nonchalantly as one descends the steps of the cellar to fetch a glass of Moselwein.³⁷⁰ Following this image Mandelshtam refers to the German language as his future “skin,” and states that prior to his birth he was a “grapevine line.” The Christological image of grapes transformed into wine suggests the poet’s wish for a death in one language and resurrection in another. The interlocutor who belongs to a “foreign family” [“*chuzhdoe semeistvo*”]— teaches about the ease and grace of transformation. Moreover, the word, which simply by virtue of being itself already represents transformation, cannot equal itself. For Mandelshtam the idea of incarnation implies that non-correspondence is a kind of totality. The concept of wholeness comprises desire and inclusion of the other.

Mandelshtam does not strive for the “objective” self in the manner of Ivanov and Bely, nor for Kuzmin’s self-knowledge and command. Instead, he is partial and vulnerable to the interlocutor and his idiom. Of critical importance to Mandelshtam’s “poetics of incarnation” is the fact that in the same way that the poem implies the presence of several interlocutors, so the foreign word in the poem remains foreign. Whether the unfamiliar encases the native, or the native incorporates and recreates the foreign, the relationship between the two shapes the speaker, who “slept without image and form” [“*spal bez oblika i sklada*”] before meeting his interlocutor. The line “another’s speech will be my skin” [“*chuzhaia rech’ mne budet obolochkoi*”] illustrates the idea that foreign speech shapes one’s own, but also that the word in general contains and is shaped by something other than itself.

The verse referenced by Lotman and quoted above illustrates another important point: “To German Speech” juxtaposes not only foreign and native idioms, but also the written and the

³⁷⁰ *I priamo so stranitsy al'manakha,
Ot novizny ego pervostateinoi,
Sbegali v grob stupen'kami, bez strakha,
Kak v pogrebok za kruzhkoi mozel'veina.*

spoken one. Just as sound shocks the speaker awake to the presence of the other— “I was wakened by friendship as by a shot” [“Ia druzhboi byl kak vystrelom razbuzhen”]—so a foreign tongue awakens the Russian language. Until the encounter with the interlocutor, the speaker knows German only on the page. Letters, verses, pages, almanacs all refer to printed text. But while the narrator *was* in writing, he *is*—in speech, and in this case, in dialog with foreign speech. The sound of the foreign language emerges, resistant, hissing and mutinous, in the last lines of the poem, as it rebels against the poet’s efforts to introduce it into the soundscape of his poem: “the sound narrowed, words hiss and rebel [...]” [“zvuk suzilsia, slova shipiat, buntuiut [...]”]. But in fact, the poem contains numerous acquiescent German words and names: almanac, Goethe, Moselwein, Frankfurt, Walhalla, and nachtigall, among others. The poem’s soundscape as a whole alludes to the sound of German. Transition from the written to the spoken word is analogous to the transition from the foreign, to the foreign—and—one’s own. To be “incarnated,” to be born, the word must be spoken.

The Epic “Gesture” as a Model of Clarity

Mandelstam’s model of clarity reflects both Ivanov and Kuzmin’s approaches, combining the idea of continuity with the idea of metamorphosis based in a “sign of rupture.” Clarity is a poetic utterance as a literal action as well as a symbolic action. It emerges free of cause, spontaneously, yet it is also an act of memory, directed toward, and called forth by, an interlocutor. The spoken word is both a totality and a discrete part of a greater whole. As it courses between the unknown that precedes it and the unknown that it addresses, both unknowns

manifest themselves in the speech act. Mandelshtam's clarity does not apply to knowledge, but rather to the process of knowing, wherein the utterance acts as interpretation and translation.³⁷¹

I argue that Mandelshtam's poetic project gestures toward the epic, imagined as a spoken genre and absorbed into the lyric as a gesture, a mode, or an intention of the word.³⁷² Since Mandelshtam, like Kuzmin, rejects the biographical self as the speaker of the poem, the poetic utterance becomes an origin story with no easily identifiable origin, in the same way that the epic is a founding narrative even though it has no historical author. The body— as a primary and universally shared reality—appears in Mandelshtam's poetry as the only reference to the “origin” of the utterance.

In this context the concept of clarity appears in Mandelshtam's work in two interrelated functions. In the 1920s it represents the “spacious” word, whereby the signifier and the signified— in Mandelshtam's vocabulary, the sound and the image—co-create one another as entities that are quantum-like in their capacity to be discrete and continuous at once. This definition contains some Italian, and more specifically Roman motifs. In the absence of time as a limiting factor, the Italian “image” manifests itself in the Russian word as a beacon of clarity.

During this period Mandelshtam gives his poetic response to the polemic that transpired on the pages of *Works and Days* and *Apollon* in 1912. In his “Lethan Poems” (1923) he creates an Orpheus who echoes the Symbolists' hero as it references Kuzmin's aesthetic. But his Orpheus confronts a situation that they eschew: the disappearance and loss of language and therefore knowledge. The Orphic quest is still for the “spacious,” clear word whose feat is to articulate the unintelligible. This “unintelligible” does not reside within the privileged sphere of

³⁷¹ Lotman discusses Mandelshtam's view of the poet as an interpreter in “Poetika voploshchionnogo slova,” 201.

³⁷² I have specifically the Homeric epic in mind.

Ivanov's mystical insight, but pertains to the experience of loss, common to all, and raised to the dimension of the mystical.

In the 1930s, when the Silver Age of Russian poetry appeared to be a matter of the distant past, the poet returns to clarity not to define it, but to use it as an emblem of the preceding generation's quest for a poetics of knowledge. In the poems that I address Mandelshtam revives Orpheus as an embodiment of a paradigmatic poet. He makes references to both Bely and Kuzmin—at a time immediately following the deaths of these two poets—and reconciles these antagonists specifically on the ground of their disagreement. At this time Mandelshtam's idea of clarity obtains truly epic stature. Below, I first examine the idea of clarity as it pertains to the philosophy of the “epic” word in Mandelshtam's poetry. I then look at several poems from his “Lethan Poems,” and conclude with an overview of the transformation of the idea of clarity in the 1930s.

In the 1920s Mandelshtam's concept of the poetic word in “On the Nature of the Word” and especially in “Word and Culture” not only makes use of the notion of clarity, but evokes, probably entirely coincidentally, Georg Lukács' interpretation of the Homeric epic as it appears in his 1916 *The Theory of the Novel*. Lukács describes the epic mindset: “The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to each other.”³⁷³ He envisions the epic as a “totality” that is inherently meaningful in each instance, and that answers the question “how can life become essential?”³⁷⁴ As a literary form, it is a “becoming conscious” of its own totality. If Lukács' essay and Mandelshtam's concept of the word overlap in their understanding of the “Homeric” and

³⁷³ G. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 29.

³⁷⁴ Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 34.

“Hellenic” word as expressing a totality and inherent meaning in each instance, as a whole and as a fragment, it is because Mandelshtam’s poetic word also seeks to “become conscious” of its own totality. The definition of a genre is applied to the lyric word.

The poet expresses his views on language as he polemicizes with the Symbolists. In “On the Nature of the Word” he writes that the Symbolists “discovered” the “original figurative nature of the word” [“iznachal’ nuii obraznuii prirodu slova”], implying that the word’s “original” nature cannot be separated from image. The Symbolists were not able to make use of the full potential of their own discovery, affixing the word, label-like, to its symbolic signification, but detaching it from its purpose: “The word is already a sealed image; it can’t be touched. It’s not for everyday use [...]” “Slovo uzhe est’ obraz zapechatannyi: ego nel’zia trogat’. On ne prigoden dlia obikhoda <...> The sealed image removed from usage is hostile to man—it is a kind of stuffed puppet or scarecrow” [“zapechatannyi, iz’iatyi iz upotrebleniia obraz vrazhdeben cheloveku, on v svo’em rode chuchelo, pugalo.”]³⁷⁵ The Symbolists detach the word from its context only to affix it to another, invisible one.³⁷⁶ While they seek to repurpose the word, they emphasize causes: the active word that would effectuate their mystical visions. This confusion of cause and purpose creates the effect of fracturing. Mandelshtam proposes that integrity arrives once the ties between the word’s components are loosened:

The most convenient and in a scientific sense most correct thing is to regard the word as image, that is, as verbal representation. In this way the question of form and content is eliminated—if phonetics is the form, everything else is the content. The question of which has the primary significance—the word or its sounding nature—is eliminated. Verbal representation, the intricate complex of phenomena, communication, “system.” The significance of the word can be seen as a candle burning from within a paper lantern,

³⁷⁵ Mandel’shtam, “O prirode slova,” *PSS* 2:64-81, 76.

³⁷⁶ I. Paperno, “O prirode poeticheskogo slova,” 33.

Paperno explains that in Mandelshtam’s perspective the Symbolists’ word is indentured to its symbolic significance. On the opposite side of the spectrum, there is realism, which envisions the word as tied to the object it represents.

and, conversely, the sound representation, the so-called phoneme, can be placed inside the significance, like that same candle in that same lantern.”³⁷⁷

Purpose (convenience) rather than cause governs the poet’s approach to language. It is easier to work with the word once the poet conceives of it as a representation. Untethered from a single, specific signification it becomes a coherent and dynamic plurality, where none of its aspects may be claimed as a fixed “truth,” and any number of contextual and associative paths can lead to the referent.

In the following paragraph Mandelshtam describes the relationship between the speaker and language as parallel to the relationship of the phonetic and the semantic elements of the word. Words are “objects” that the mind beholds, but they are also the “organs”— “like the liver or the heart”—that render the world intelligible. As an “object,” language does not exist without the mind’s illuminating power. As an “organ” indispensable to the function of the mind, it is inextricable from the process of making meaning. Like light in a lantern, meaning is both immanent and transcendent to the word, and language to the self. The image and the sound, and the self and language are discrete and inextricable elements of a totality.

The “epic gesture” of Mandelshtam’s poetics anticipates Mikhail Bakhtin’s definition of the epic. Bakhtin understands the genre as definitively over, and defines it as addressing “a national epic past—in Goethe’s and Schiller’s terminology the ‘absolute past.’” He describes the source for the epic as “national tradition (not personal experience and the free thought that grows out of it)” and believes that “an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality, that is, from the time in which the singer (the author and his audience) lives.”³⁷⁸ Mandelshtam’s poetics reverses this definition. It emphasizes the physical act of speech

³⁷⁷ Mandel’shtam, “O prirode slova,” 64-81, 78.

³⁷⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel.” *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 13.

as both most personal and most universal, and directs it toward the listener located at a remote distance. As the personal word continuously gestures toward the remote, it gestures to the epic by evoking its own universal nature. In the essay “On the Interlocutor” [“O sobesednike”] (1913) Mandelshtam expresses this notion:

So, if individual poems (in the form of epistles or dedications) can be addressed to concrete persons, poetry as a whole is always directed to a more or less distant, unknown addressee, whose existence the poet cannot doubt without doubting himself. Metaphysics has nothing to do with it. Only reality can summon another reality to life. The poet is not a homunculus, and there is no reason to attribute to him the properties of spontaneous self-generation.³⁷⁹

The word’s origin is unknown except as the body, whose dynamic, creative form is a shared, universal reality. Awareness of this relationship as a universal absolute lends the figure of the speaker truly cosmic dimensions, while the drama of the spoken word as it journeys toward the distant interlocutor obtains the features of an epic narrative.³⁸⁰ Delivered in the immediacy of the present, Mandelshtam’s epic word is always both subjective interpretation and fact.

Mandelshtam insists that the “reality” of the interlocutor is called forth by the “reality” of the spoken word. The interlocutor is both an independent “object” *and* emerges due to the “realness” of the word. The relationship of continuity that exists between the poet and the “distant, unknown interlocutor” is not analogous to the continuity of immediate context. Mandelshtam emphasizes this idea in one of the chapters of his autobiographical text “The Noise of Time” (1923), where he also references the epic, albeit of the kind he does not want to write. He writes: “I’d like to talk not of myself, but rather pay attention to the age, the noise and space

³⁷⁹ Mandel’shtam, “O sobesednike.” *PSS* 2: 212.

³⁸⁰ Poignantly, some ten years later the metaphoric homunculus—the individualist poet, oblivious to partaking in the process of interpretation—will be reinterpreted by Kuzmin as a representation of Bely’s failed experiment in prose. As I mentioned earlier, Bely’s fault is ultimately mistrust of the body, and metonymy wrongfully applied to an abstraction.

of time. My memory is hostile to everything personal,” [“mne khochetsia govorit’ ne o sebe, a sedit’ za vekom, za shumom i prostranstvom vremeni. Pamiat’ moia vrazhdebna vsemu lichnomu,”] and continues:

I could never understand the Tolstoy and Aksakovs, and the Bagrov-grandchildren, enamored of the family archives with their epic domestic remembrances. I repeat: my memory is not loving, but inimical, and works not on the reproduction of the past, but its removal. A *raznochinets* [term for an intellectual not belonging to the gentry class] doesn’t need memory—it’s enough for him to talk about the books he’s read, and that’ll do for his biography. Where for happy generations the epic speaks in hexameters and chronicles, for me there is a sign of rupture in that place, and between me and the age lies a gap, a ditch filled with the noise of time [...]³⁸¹

Tolstoy’s and Aksakov’s meditations under the genealogical tree are unappealing to the narrator the way they were unappealing to Kuzmin’s Shtrup and Vanya Smurov. Dismissal of an overarching biographical or autobiographical narrative is the rejection of metonymy: the self does not want to be defined by the whole to which it belongs. This can be gleaned apophatically from the fact that in the review of Bely’s *Notes of an Eccentric*, Mandelshtam praises Tolstoy’s “epic” *War and Peace*, but attacks Bely’s novel, and criticizes Tolstoy’s “epic” trilogy *Childhood, Adolescence, Youth* in the quote above. Mandelshtam’s objection reveals a connection between the two fundamentally different texts—Tolstoy’s realist trilogy and Bely’s Symbolist *Notes*—and sets them apart from Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. In the latter work the narrator maintains the kind of distance from his narrative that allows language to embody “the intermittent sign of the incessant.” In both Bely’s *Notes* and Tolstoy’s trilogy the speaker’s voice is defined by the sense of belonging whether of the individual to his kin, or the individual “seer” to the Symbolist realm of Platonic Ideas. In this context, the distinction between prose and poetry is secondary to the relationship between the speaker and the text. In the essay “Invective”

³⁸¹ Mandel’shtam, “Shum vremeni,” *PSS* 2: 250.

["Vypad"] (1924) Mandelshtam references the predominantly poetic movement of Symbolism as a "tribe" ["rod"] and the time of its reign as a tribal epoch "rodovaia epokha," associating the Symbolists with the "epic" prose writers of the previous century.³⁸² The relationship "self—world" or "self—text" can only be expressed by "the sign of rupture" ["znak ziianiia"]—a metaphor— as opposed to the metonymic "intermittent sign of the incessant."

The sign of rupture is a lapse in knowledge or memory, and the absence of a causative, continuous relationship between the image and sound within the word, the self and the world, and the speaker and the spoken word.³⁸³ The "epic totality" of Mandelshtam's lyric project implies a continuity that originates in a cognitive leap. The speech act is an emblem of clarity as interpretation: an utterance is discrete, but in its function as repetition and interpretation it is continuous. Speech as a universal, physical phenomenon suggests the likewise universal possibility of an inadvertent blunder, forgetting, misspeaking, or mispronouncing a word, whereby meaning is created through substitution and metaphor—unexpectedly, rather than causatively. Mandelshtam not only allows these interruptions into his poetry, but at times represents them within the fabric of his poetics as images of the unknown.

The word "clarity" appears in the essay "Word and Culture," where it is embedded in a quotation from the Roman poet Catullus. Mandelshtam writes:

³⁸² Mandel'shtam, "Vypad." *PSS* 2:150.

³⁸³ The idea of the epic as based in rupture is consistent with Mandelshtam's technical approach to the epic in his own poetry. Lidiya Ginzburg notes that the language of his *Tristia* parallels Nikolai Gnedich, who recreated Homer in Russian by blending colloquial and archaic Russian. Ginzburg also references Iuri Tynianov's observation that Mandelshtam is able to use a single word, for example, "vigils" ["*vigili*"], in such a way that the entire poem "Tristia" obtains "classical" sound. (L. Ginzburg, 343.) Mandelshtam's use of archaic lexicon creates a discontinuity that renews the classical tradition, for the poet evokes classicism against the established classical "clear" model. His contemporaries, such as the futurist Khlebnikov, used archaisms and "neo-archaisms" to the opposite effect, to de-classicize the lyric.

There are certain epochs when mankind, not satisfied with the present, yearning like a ploughman, hungers for untouched strata of time [...] Yesterday has not yet been born. It hasn't yet truly existed. I want Ovid, Pushkin, and Catullus once more, and I'm not satisfied with the historical Ovid, Pushkin, and Catullus [...] Catullus' silver trumpet: "Ad claras Asiae volemus urbes" is more tormenting and disturbing than any Futurist riddle. We don't have this in Russian. And yet it must exist in Russian.³⁸⁴

The poet explains that he has chosen Catullus because the Russian reader easily identifies the imperative in the Latin language, and elaborates that the command is to recreate in Russian the resounding "this" of Catullus's verse. To understand what Mandelshtam means by "this," one must know the original. In poem XLVI of the *Carmina* Catullus's lyric subject joyously lays down his official duties in the Roman provinces in Asia Minor and contemplates his imminent return to Rome. But as he looks to his return, he is struck with wanderlust and wants to behold the "claras urbes" – the "clear," "bright," or "illustrious" cities built by the Greeks on the Asian shores of the Aegean Sea.³⁸⁵ Desire of the radiant unknown transforms into clarity of articulation: "ad claras Asiae volemus urbes." He bids farewell to his friends, and states enigmatically that while they set out on their journey together, each will return along his own route. Every traveler is Odysseus the Ithacan, who arrives on the shores of his native land without his companions. Catullus might also be referring to death as a destination that can only be reached alone.

Catullus's remote cities are clear because they have no features except remoteness and luminosity. They represent a lapse of knowledge and the liberating and radiant promise of exploration. Yet there is obvious continuity between them and the speaker. For the Roman, ancient Greek cities emblemize an origin, alternative to historical or biographical "roots." To the narrator of the poem, the "clear cities" are what Botticelli's Venus is to Mandelshtam in

³⁸⁴ Mandel'shtam, "Slovo i kul'tura," 51.

³⁸⁵ Valerius C. Catullus, *Carmina*. Ed. E.T. Merrill (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1893), 80.

“Silentium.” The narrator’s choice of destination is analogous to his choice of origin: purpose prevails over cause. Since movement toward the future is equivalent to movement into the past—since to begin is therefore to see the end—Catullus’s clarity is an image of the “spacious” word. The “claras urbes” are not the fixed prototype, upon which the author bases his copy, but the sign of freedom. They are also the “origin” as the progeny: the past that is yet to be born.

Catullus’s verse illustrates the thesis of “Word and Culture”: words and images are as distinct as they are connected. The open vowels and cold, hard consonants are inextricable from the spaciousness and luminosity of the image—yet the narrator insists on the distance between them. The space between the sound and the image, or Catullus’s narrator and the distant cities is analogous to the relationship between Mandelshtam and Catullus’s poem, and between Mandelshtam’s narrator and the interlocutor in the “On the Interlocutor.” In each case, the act of speech is an interpretation of the previous utterance, and an address to the future one. The beginning is not starting from zero, to the contrary: as is the word within which resound the numerous precedents that are also the future possibilities, it is a kind of glossolalia.

Years later this idea reemerges in the sixth poem of Mandelshtam’s cycle *Armenia* (1930), when he describes Armenia as: “flying eternally towards the silver trumpets of Asia” [“K trubam serebrianykh Azii vechno letiashchaia.”]³⁸⁶ The verse improvises on the soundscape of Catullus’s Latin, and repeats the original composition, except now the protagonist is a country in perpetual flight toward a distant object. This time, Catullus’s words themselves obtain the form of the “silver trumpet”—though due to the semantic ambiguity of the word “truba” they could also mean “smokestacks”—and replace the ancient Greek cities as the remote destination.

³⁸⁶ Mandel’shtam, *PSS* 1:148.

“Word and Culture” and the poem from the *Armenia* cycle depict clarity as the spoken word. To “give birth” to yesterday is to speak. Both texts reference the trumpet so obviously associated with lungs, the throat and the mouth, and breath: the open, spacious a’s in the line by Catullus, and the u-a-e-ii-a-ia in the poem. The trumpet enacts and represents the utterance as a perpetual beginning that carries with it the seed of difference – the possibility and the necessity of its own alternative. The trumpet is an image of sound—an encapsulation of the idea that the two are distinct and inseparable. It is the word in its function as actor and action, noun and verb, metaphor and metonymic extension of the body. This tautological image amplifies both space and time and incorporates and activates previous instances of speech.

The relationship of clarity to the spoken word comes into focus in a chapter from Mandelshtam’s novella “The Noise of Time” (1923), “In a Fur Coat Above One’s Station,” where the narrator describes his older contemporary and another mentor figure, Nikolai Nedobrovo, reciting Tyutchev:

His speech—even apart from this extremely clear, with wide open vowels—as if recorded on silver records, became astonishingly clear when it came to reading Tyutchev, especially his alpine poems: “And which year shows white” and “And now the dawn is sowing.” Then a real flood of open “a’s”—it seemed as if the reciter had just rinsed his throat with cold alpine water.

Rech’ ego, i bez togo chrezmerno iasnaia, s shiroko otkrytymi glasnymi, kak by zapisannaia na serebrianykh plastinkakh, proiasnialas’ na udivlenie, kogda dokhodilo do Tyutcheva, osobenno do al’piiskikh stikhov: “A kotoryi god beleet” i “A zaria i nynche seet.” Togda nachinalsia nastoiashschii razliv otkrytykh “a”: kazalos’, chtets tol’ko chto propoloskal gorlo kholodnoi al’piiskoi vodoi.³⁸⁷

In Tyutchev’s poem “Bright snow shone in the valley” [“Iarkii sneg siial v doline,”] the snowy peaks of the Alps, like Catullus’s exotic cities, or the Latin he spoke, are beyond immediate

³⁸⁷ Mandel’shtam, *Shum vremeni*, PSS 2: 256.

experience.³⁸⁸ They tower over human experience, and represent eternal, unchanging spring, in contrast to the ebb and flow of seasons down below, where the speaker is located. Yet the particular quality of Nedobrovo's speech allows one to experience the distant immediately. The metonymic derivative of Tyutchev's image —cold alpine water that "clears" his throat— is the communion of the spoken word as the eternal beginning, shared by the participants in this conversation.³⁸⁹ Poignantly, this continuity is based on an imperfection: at least in Mandelshtam's rendering, Nedobrovo says "and which year shows white" ["a kotoryi god beleet"], whereas Tyutchev's original line reads "but which year shows white" ["no kotoryi god beleet"]. Much as in the passage about Catullus and the later poem about Armenia, clarity emerges from this loss: the open vowel enhances the spaciousness of the line. Mandelshtam's passage unifies a multiplicity of voices that reveal one another as if in perspective: from Mandelshtam to Nedobrovo, from Nedobrovo to Tyutchev, and from Tyutchev to the Alps and the "eternal dawn" of their snow. These voices and images are incorporated in a whole, without losing their individual character.

Finally, even more obviously than in the previous two examples, in this passage the word and the image co-create one another: the Alpine peaks resemble a towering mass of A's.³⁹⁰ If this is a visual echo, based on the appearance of the letter A, it is because Mandelshtam's emphasis

³⁸⁸ The first line of Tyutchev's poem, which starts with the word "Iarkii," where the "ia" is also emphasized, and then repeats the sound "ia," again stressed, in the word "siial" supports Bely's take on "iasnost'." Mandelshtam obviously favors the vowel "a".

³⁸⁹ Omry Ronen, *An Approach to Mandel'shtam* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1983), 348. Ronen mentions the idea of communion in reference to Mandelshtam's poem "Variant" ["Net, nikogda, nichei ia ne byl sovremennik"] as well as "Slovo i kul'tura." He describes "an allegory of communion in which poets partake of the creative spirit of all ages." He refers to the passage of "Slovo i kul'tura," where the poet describes glossolalia as taking hold of the poets of his time: ["Slovo stalo ne semistvol'noi, a tysiachastvol'noi tcevnitsei, ozhivliaemoi srazu dykhaniem vsekh vekov."]

³⁹⁰ This is unlike Bely, whose concept of clarity is based in the concept of self and "ia" as its signifier.

on the spoken does not exclude the written, but obviously incorporates it. Indeed, he uses the written word to communicate the idea that the vulnerability and at the same time the universality of speech creates, rather than simply transmits meaning.³⁹¹

Mandelstam's "Lethan poems" (1923) address not speech but speechlessness as the situation that, paradoxically, must be articulated. The cycle comprises two sets of poems initially published separately. The two poems, "The Swallow" ("I forgot the word I meant to say") ["Ia slovo pozabyl, chto ia khotel skazat'"] and "When Psyche-Life descends to shades" ["Kogda Psikheia-zhizn' spuskaetsia k teniam"] date to 1920 and were published together. The second set of poems, the "Arbenina cycle," was also written in 1920 and is dedicated to the ending of Mandelstam's relationship with Olga Arbenina. In 1923 these two cycles were published together as the "Lethan poems."³⁹² "The Swallow," and "I intervened in the circle dance of shades that stamped upon the tender meadow" ["Ia v khorovod tenei, toptavshii neznyi lug"]

³⁹¹An earlier example where misspeaking creates not only new meaning, but destroys a world and creates a new one is the 1912 poem "Obraz tvoi muchitel'nyi i zybki." When its narrator is unable to discern an indistinct, troubling image—a visual representation of obscurity—he utters God's name by mistake:

Obraz tvoi, muchitel'nyi i zybki,
Ia ne mog v tumane osiazat'.
"Gospodi!"—skazal ia po oshibke,
Sam togo ne dumaia skazat'.

Bozhe imia, kak bol'shaia ptitsa,
Vyletelo iz moei grudi!
Vpered gustoi tuman klubitsia,
I pustaia kletka pozadi...

The name of the deity flies the coop leaving the "empty cage" of the poet's body behind. While the original separation is not mended, the mistake concretizes the indistinct in a new way. The act of misspeaking encapsulates the idea that words do not describe, but substitute and thereby create a new reality. Furthermore, the narrator substitutes the word for the image without calculation, overriding a rational connection between them. In this poem not only does metaphor precede metonymy, it destroy its context.

³⁹²Irina Kovaleva, "Psikheia u Persefony: ob istochnikakh odnogo antichnogo motiva u Mandel'shtama." *NLO* 73 (2005): 203-211.

describe the descent of living beings—Orpheus, Psyche, an unnamed hero who could be Orpheus—into Hades. “The Swallow,” especially, illustrates the idea that as the lyric poem seeks the word as a “totality” it dramatizes memory. I will focus on this poem, referencing “When Psyche-Life...” and “I’ll join the circle dance...” where necessary.

Ia slovo pozabyi, chto ia khotel skazat.
Slepaia lastochka v chertog tenei vernetsia,
Na kryliakh srezannymi s prozrachnymi igrat’.
V bespamiatstve nochnaia pesn’ poetsia.

Ne slyshno ptits. Bessmertnik ne tsvetet.
Prozrachny grivy tabuna nochnogo.
V sukhoi reke pustoi chelnok plyvet.
Sredi kuznechikov bespamiatstvuet slovo.

I medlenno rastet, kak by shatter il’ khram,
To vdrug prokinetsia bezumnoi Antigonoï,
To mertvoi lastochkoi brosaetsia k nogam
S stigiiskoi nezhnost’iu i vetkoïu zelenoi.

O esli by vernut’ i zriachikh pal’tsev styd,
I vypukluiu radost’ uznavan’ia.
Ia tak boius’ rydan’ia Aonid,
Tumana, zvona i ziian’ia.

A smertnym vlast’ dana liubit’ i uznavat’,
Dlia nikh i zvuk v persty prol’etsia,
No ia zabyi, chto ia khochu skazat’,
I mysl’ besplotnaia v chertog tenei vernetsia.

Vse ne o tom prozrachnaia tverdit,
Vse lastochka, podruzhka, Antigona...
A na gubakh, kak chernyi led gorit
Stigiiskogo vospominan’e zvona.³⁹³

I forgot the word I meant to say.
A blind swallow returns to a hall of shades,
On clipped wings, to play with transparent things.
A night song is sung in unconsciousness.

No bird is heard. The immortelle is not in bloom.
Transparent are the night herds’ manes.
In a dry river floats an empty skiff.
Among the grasshoppers the word forgets itself.

And slowly it grows, a tent or a temple,
Shoots past itself like a mad Antigone,
Or like a dead swallow falls to one’s feet
With Stygian tenderness and a green twig.

O to regain both the shame of sighted fingers,
And the palpable joy of recognition.
I’m so afraid of the wailing of the Aonides,
Of the fog, the ringing and the abyss.

But to mortals is given to love and to recognize,
For them the sound will flow into their hands,
But I forgot what I meant to say,
And disembodied thought goes back to the hall of shades.

The transparent thing insists on other things,
The swallow, a girl—a friend, Antigone..
While on the lips burns like black ice
The Stygian recollection of a ringing sound.

As the poet tries to remember the forgotten word, forgetting becomes his hero’s external reality.

Since the central idea is the return of the word into the state prior to articulation, and so its

³⁹³ Mandel’shtam, *PSS* 1:110.

divestment of “flesh” (“disembodied thought”) [“mysl’ besplotnaia”], it is possible to interpret this space also as the “inner image” that resounds in the mind of the poet before the poem obtains the words. A striking feature of this landscape is the absence of finality. Sound, for example, is interminable: “a night song is sung in unconsciousness,” “among the grasshoppers the word forgets itself,” “the fog, the ringing and the abyss,” and the discarnate soul repeats something over and over again ceaselessly. All action in this space is imperfective: the Immortelle flower is not blooming, the boat sails in a hollow river, and the mysterious tabernacle—the metaphoric representation of the forgotten word—rises but never reaches completion. In “When Psyche-Life descends to shades” Psyche also faces this obstacle when she is encircled by the shades, whose laments are indistinct and inarticulate. The Soul is suddenly disoriented: “And in gentle commotion, not knowing what to start, / The soul doesn’t recognize the transparent oaks [...]” and for at least an instant loses her purpose. Similarly, the protagonist of “I intervened in the circle dance of shades that stamped upon the tender meadow” encounters a situation where remembrance of a name or possession of the beloved is frustratingly beyond his grasp.

In these poems the object is not recovered, nor the word remembered. The hero’s effort to remedy the loss is futile: the murmur of forgetting is not interrupted by the recovery of Eurydice. What the lyric word does recover is the forgetting itself. It is appropriate that the entire poem, indeed the entire poetic cycle—references, resembles or takes place in a theater: since oblivion cannot be approached literally and requires figurative language.

The final image of the poem—the din of the underworld that burns on the lips of the speaker like black ice—encapsulates the idea of the word as a totality predicated on rupture. Presaging Mandelstam’s “Word and Culture,” the image of the melting ice resembles Catullus’s word as “silver horn.” Both tropes treat sound and image as inextricable and distinct components

of the word, and both function simultaneously as metaphor and metonymy. But unlike the “clear” word in “Word and Culture,” Orpheus’s word addresses continuity in reverse. Catullus’s narrator “originates” in the “other” en route to a rebirth. His “imperative” is to perpetuate tradition as a kind of communion. Never caused or determined by history, and free of time as a condition, it always relates to history and recreates it on its own terms. Conversely, Orpheus’s voyage is the opposite of a homecoming. He travels through an alienating landscape that signifies the death of the word, and his imperative is to “originate”—or to make intelligible—this very death. The hero descends into “rupture”—as the unintelligible space that yields words—and recovers the “night sun” of language: the silent word that burns on his lips as a metonymic extension of the glacial waters of Styx. The reverse of Catullus’s “trumpet,” the ice, in turn, melts on the poet’s lips and perpetually returns to its source in timelessness.³⁹⁴

The final image of the poem is dual in its nature, in keeping with the “Orphic tendency to a dualist worldview,” and what Terras terms the Orphic “ambivalence of opposing principles.”³⁹⁵ The poet’s lips with the seal of the silent word upon them represent perpetual liminality, and, to use Edward Said’s terminology, “intransitivity.” The hero of the poem seeks a lost object, but ends up with no object “other than his own clarification.”³⁹⁶ His initially “transitive” quest

³⁹⁴In the essay “The Dry River and the Black Ice,” Omry Ronen observes that ancient sources “describe the water of Styx as cold [...] or livid.” He points out that Mandelshtam’s specific source for the metonymy of black ice is likely Apuleius. Regarding the “black ice” simile Ronen observes, brilliantly: “As so many of Mandelshtam’s similes are, this one, too, is motivated metonymically,” and “the ‘black ice,’ an oxymoron and a simile at the level of the text, is, at the subtextual level, a metonymy of Mnemosine’s *psychron hydor* and the Stydian *fons ater* [...]” Omry Ronen, “The Dry River and the Black Ice.” *Slavica Hierosolymitana* I (1977): 177-84, 184.

³⁹⁵ Terras, “‘The Black Sun’,” 46.

³⁹⁶ In his *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Edward Said describes two models of a beginning: “These two sides of the starting point entail two styles of thought, and of imagination, one projective and descriptive, the other tautological and endlessly self-mimetic. The transitive mode is always hungering <...> for an object it can never fully catch up with in either space or time.

becomes a perpetually “intransitive” one. But while the poem as a whole is a substitute for the missing word, it is also its trace, and it invites further attempts to follow the hero in his quest to find it.³⁹⁷ The entire cycle of the “Lethean poems” conjures up the image of a lost object.³⁹⁸ The poems have the quality of a riddle that resists deciphering, transforming the “transitive” subject-object relationship into a semantic trap. The reader follows the hero in his Orphic quest for knowledge, only to learn that the shadow-image is present because it is not named directly. The word is cryptic when treated as an object of knowledge, and lucid when allowed to evoke meaning indirectly. Clarity does not preclude obscurity.

In addition to containing numerous classical allusions ranging from Sophocles’ *Antigone* to Gluck’s opera, the “Lethean poems” reference both Kuzmin’s and Ivanov’s writings. The relationship between the cycle and Kuzmin’s aesthetic has been examined, for instance, by Irina Kovaleva, who provides an illuminating analysis of Mandelshtam’s use of Kuzmin’s vocabulary from his translation of Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass* in “The Swallow” and “When Psyche-Life descends to shades.” The poet utilizes Kuzmin’s specific lexicon from the *mise en abyme* tale of Cupid and Psyche. The scholar also details the well-known circumstances that likely inspired Mandelshtam’s writing the poems, and that also associate him with Kuzmin. Olga Arbenina’s

The intransitive <...> can never have enough of itself—in short, expansion and concentration, or words in language, and the Word.” Said also comments that the “intransitive” beginning is one that “has no object but its own constant clarification.” Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 73.

³⁹⁷ See for instance Mikhail Gronas, “Just what word did Mandelshtam forget?” in *Cognitive Poetics and Cultural Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 110-116. Gronas suggests that the poem “The Swallow” contains the anagram *Aid*, or Hades, and that this is the word the poet forgets.

³⁹⁸ The poem “Ia v khorovod tenei” references Italian Renaissance painting, and evokes especially Botticelli’s “Allegory of Spring,” itself quite mysterious. Considering that the poem was written for Arbenina, there is an interesting parallel with Kuzmin’s observation in his 1934 Diary, that she resembles Simonetta Vespucci, one of Botticelli’s beloved and most iconic models, and the prototype for Spring in the aforementioned painting. Kuzmin’s description of Simonetta is applicable to his vision of Psyche. M. Kuzmin, *Dnevnik 1934 Goda*, 40.

break with Mandelshtam coincided with Meyerhold's restaging of Gluck's opera in St. Petersburg; during their relationship the couple likely saw it together. As was mentioned previously, Kuzmin had written about Gluck and was associated with the production of his opera. Additionally, Arbenina inadvertently united Kuzmin and Mandelshtam in loss: she left Mandelshtam to be with Kuzmin's long-term lover, Yuri Yurkun. Much to Kuzmin's distress—eventually muffled and transformed into uneasy acceptance—the relationship became triangular and remained so for the rest of Kuzmin's life. Mandelshtam's evocation of the older poet's specific aesthetic in telling the Orphic story of loss could have been motivated at least in part by the circumstances surrounding the poems' composition.³⁹⁹

But while Mandelshtam imbues the imagery and the soundscape of the poems with crystalline "Kuzminian" clarity, he emphasizes the obscurity of the situation wherein the heroes of the poems find themselves. Unlike Kuzmin's narrator, who has, figuratively speaking, already reached the Elysian fields, Mandelshtam's Orpheus is barred from entry there.⁴⁰⁰ The poem "I intervened in the circle dance," for instance, describes the hero's inability to enter the "circle dance" of shades or souls who are associated with spring and happiness. In the last two stanzas

³⁹⁹ Kovaleva, "Psikheia u Persefony," 207-208. The scholar notes that Kuzmin's translation was published well after Mandelshtam wrote the "Lethan cycle," however, the overlap in vocabulary leads her to suggest that the poet must have heard Kuzmin read his work prior to its publication, and that since Kuzmin makes use of vocabulary that is consistent with his well-established style, his choice of words influenced Mandelshtam's, and not the other way around.

⁴⁰⁰ Kuzmin's 1921 poem "Vot posle rzhavykh l'vov i reva" describes Orpheus' descent into Hades. It is also based on Gluck's opera and references the *Dance of the Blessed Spirits*, which takes place in the Elysian Fields. The poem is as cryptic as Mandelshtam's, but Kuzmin's protagonist is accompanied by Eurydice and experiences a state of grace and gratitude. Since the two will not seek to return from the Elysian Fields—"Whoever sets his feet here once / Needs not think about the return." ["Ne nado dumat' o vozvrate/ Tomu, kto raz stupil suda,"]—Hades for them is a place of blissful metamorphosis and clarity. This representation of the Orphic descent contrasts greatly with both Mandelshtam's and the Symbolists' writing on the subject.

their circle dance transforms into the hero's walking in circles as he tries to grasp what eludes him.

A schast'e katitsia, kak obruch zolotoi,
Chuzhuiu voliu ispolniaia,
I ty goniaeshsia za legkoiu vesnoi,
Ladon'iu vozdukh rassekaia.

But happiness like a gold hoop rolls along,
Fulfilling another's will,
And you chase after breezy spring,
Cleaving the air with your palm.

I tak ustroeno, chto ne vykhodim my
Iz zakoldovannogo kruga.
Zemli devicheskoi uprugie kholmy
Lezhat spelenatye tugo.⁴⁰¹

And its so fixed that we don't leave
The vicious circle.
The springy hills of maiden earth
Are swaddled firmly.

The Edenic logos and Psyche as an image of wholeness remain out of reach. In the context of Mandelshtam's comments in "On Contemporary Poetry" (1916) about Kuzmin's hypothetically recalled Psyche, and the poet's criticism of Kuzmin as artificial, a confrontation with this elusive, shade-like aspect of the word is a confrontation with reality.

Several scholars have also commented on the relationship between the "Lethean poems" and Ivanov's aesthetic philosophy. Taranovsky, for example, analyses the connection between the poems and Ivanov's belief that for the ancient Greeks, spring was closely associated with death and Dionysus. He focuses on Mandelshtam's borrowing of Ivanov's term "transparent" to convey this association.⁴⁰² Lotman makes the observation that in general Mandelshtam's approach to the relationship between Psyche as the "feminine" aspect of the word, and the Logos as knowledge evokes Sophia, or the World Soul, as the Symbolists interpreted her.⁴⁰³ Indeed, as I write in the beginning of this chapter, Ivanov understands Orpheus as the theurgic poet who must release Eurydice, who is also Sophia, from the grip of the material world. In order to do so, the

⁴⁰¹ Mandel'shtam, *PSS* 1:118.

⁴⁰² Kirill Taranovskii and M.L. Gasparov, "Ocherki o poezii O. Mandel'shtama." *O poezii i poetike* (Moscow: Iazyki Russkoi Kul'tury, 2000), 113, 120 (footnote 14).

⁴⁰³ Lotman, "Poetika voploshchionnogo slova," 208-209.

poet must avoid direct knowledge of the source whence she springs, the significance of his heroic mission, or his own self.⁴⁰⁴ According to Ivanov, the poet must be able to let go of knowing. Since in the “Lethean poems” loss catalyzes speech that is both clear and obscure, and evokes the lost object only indirectly, it is possible to view the cycle as a nearly literal fulfillment of Ivanov’s poetic instruction. There are several important differences, however. The “path of the mysteries” upon which Mandelshtam’s Orpheus finds himself, and the frontier where meaning emerges or disappears, is the subjective experience of the speech act.

The realization of the Symbolist theurgic drama on the grounds of one’s experience of language reframes the opposition “clarity—obscurity” that is so dear to Ivanov. Forgetting leads Orpheus into Hades as a space of a disembodied, babbling incessancy, rather than fecund obscurity. As itself, forgetting does not offer any revelation. But forgetting is interrupted, and the word emerges as a substitute for the missing object. Speech addressed to the interlocutor, such as Catullus’s verse, or Nedobrovo’s reciting of Tyutchev’s poem, evokes and is “born” of an instance of a speech act that belongs to somebody else, and is in that sense “transitive.” But both Catullus, whose “clear cities” must be reached by each traveler alone, and Tyutchev, whose poem centers upon the idea of the eternal clarity of the alpine snow, gesture toward a point on the horizon that can only represent the end of language. This place coincides with the Orphic “intransitive” and self-reflexive word. The two models—the chthonic and the “Apollonian”—are as opposite as they are inextricable: as the word spoken is the word lost, so the word lost engenders the word spoken.

Mandelshtam represents this double rupture in an enigmatic phrase that Omry Ronen interprets in the essay “The Dry River and the Black Ice.” In the essay “Scriabin and

⁴⁰⁴ See footnote 2 on page 3 for the specific quote from Ivanov’s essay on Scriabin.

Christianity” (1915) the poet writes on the composer’s death in the effort to wrest it from Ivanov’s interpretation as Orphic sacrifice on the altar of Dionysus. Ronen believes that when Mandelshtam states, “To die is to remember, to remember is to die,” he addresses Orpheus’ memory recovered in the space of Hades.⁴⁰⁵ Ronen’s interpretation of Mandelshtam’s aphorism saps its complexity. The statement describes the double interruption—in the fabric of memory, and in the fabric of oblivion—that yields poetic meaning. Mandelshtam’s essay addresses anamnesis as the non-correspondence of the self and the logos, and at the same time the completeness and wholeness of this relationship. The essay, which precedes the “Lethean poems” by five years, contains Mandelshtam’s response to the Symbolist debates of 1910-1912, provides the background to his writing on clarity in the early 1920s, and helps understand some of the transformations of this concept in his later poetry.

Written as a speech on the death of the composer Alexander Scriabin, “Scriabin and Christianity” survives only in fragments.⁴⁰⁶ It clearly disputes Ivanov’s depiction of Scriabin as Orpheus in “Scriabin’s Views on Art” [“Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo”], written in the same year.⁴⁰⁷ In his article Ivanov seconds Scriabin’s view of himself as one who has triumphed over the individual and the “too human” element, and as both the priest of Dionysus and as a Nietzschean *übermensch*.⁴⁰⁸ This momentous achievement comes at a price, however: the new Orpheus becomes the ritual sacrifice on his own altar.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁵ Ronen, “The Dry River and the Black Ice,” 184.

⁴⁰⁶ Mandel’shtam, “Skriabin i khristianstvo” *PSS* 2:35-41.

⁴⁰⁷ Lekmanov and Glukhova, “Osip Mandel’shtam i Viacheslav Ivanov,” 168-174.

⁴⁰⁸ Rebecca Mitchell, *Nietzsche’s Orphans: Music, Metaphysics, and the Twilight of the Russian Empire*, 67.

⁴⁰⁹ V. Ivanov. “Vzgliad Skriabina na Iskusstvo.” *SS* 3:172-189.

“Scriabin and Christianity” challenges Ivanov’s views on the cultural mission of the artist, memory, the notion of a sacrifice, and the relationship between Christianity and antiquity.⁴¹⁰ In the beginning of his essay, Mandelshtam lists the three fallacies that he believes plague his contemporary society: no unity, no personhood, no time. These misperceptions—conspicuously suggestive of Dionysian aspirations and theosophical experiments in the Symbolist circles—prompt the “new Orpheus” to cast his lyre into the sea in despair: his art has lost its meaning.⁴¹¹ Mandelshtam outlines his understanding of the relationship between art and the concept of personhood in the context of antiquity and Christian culture. The Greeks perceived the self as an entity whose integrity constantly had to be protected from the chthonic Dionysian forces. They viewed music with suspicion and preferred to contain its destructive power with songs or recitation. Like Ivanov, Mandelshtam believes that Scriabin’s music revives the aspect of antique Greek culture that the Greeks themselves feared and sought to subdue. But unlike Ivanov, he proposes that this revival serves to obliterate the suppressed fear of the ancient civilization all over again, in imitation of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice. Disintegration of the self is not a menace to the one, whose integrity is already redeemed.

Mandelshtam insists that Christianity “asks nothing in return” for this sacrifice, and that the artist is free to imitate the original creative act creatively, in other words, by means of

⁴¹⁰ Like Ivanov, Mandelshtam views Scriabin’s death as a sacrifice. This soaring rhetoric contrasts with Kuzmin’s characteristic remark in a diary entry made April 14, 1915: “Skriabin died of some kind of pimple.” M. Kuzmin. *Dnevnik 1908-1915* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Ivana Limbakha, 2005), 527.

⁴¹¹ Mandelshtam writes: “Unity is no more! ‘There are numerous worlds, situated within ‘spheres’, God rules over God!’” What is this: the ravings of madmen or the end of Christianity? Personhood is no more! “‘I’— am a temporary state—you have many souls and many lives!” Is this the raving of madmen or the end of Christianity? Time is no more! Christian chronology is in danger, lost is the fragile count of the years of our era—time rushes backward with clamor and hissing like an obstructed stream—and new Orpheus casts his lyre into the seething foam: art is no more” Mandel’shtam, “Skriabin i Khristianstvo,” 36.

metaphor.⁴¹² The “most real fact of redemption” [“real’neishii fakt iskupleniia”] transforms art into a game:

The divine illusion of redemption that resides in Christian art can be viewed as a game that the Deity plays allowing us to wander down the pathways of the mysteries, so that we may discover redemption for ourselves, and experience catharsis: redemption in art.

Like Ivanov’s Orpheus, Mandelshtam’s hero finds himself on the path of the mysteries, where he must play the “game” of hide-and-seek with the Deity, who has staged its own disappearance. To discover that he is not forsaken, he must first believe that he is. While for Ivanov this “game” is undoubtedly associated with the tragedy, the “epic gesture” of Mandelshtam’s poetics strives to integrate rather than oppose the tragic.⁴¹³ In the “Lethean poems” the hero wanders into spaces far beyond “beautiful clarity,” and captures them in a “silent” symbol—the opposite of the incessant ringing of inarticulacy—that potentially ferries the tragic into the sphere of “epic

⁴¹² In part I, chapter 5 of Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*, Iura’s uncle, Nikolai Nikolaevich, espouses similar views. He believes that Christianity allowed for the idea of “the free individual,” “life as a sacrifice,” and history as a dwelling for humanity, and claims that pre-Christian antiquity had no access to the idea of the soul’s immortality. Pasternak situates the uncle monolog in the year 1903, just before the second generation of the Symbolists begins to gain its prominent place in Moscow and St. Petersburg circles, perhaps retrospectively disputing their ideas.

Pasternak’s poem “O znal by ia, chto tak byvaet,” (1932) with its theme of art that kills the artist, is another variation on the idea of poetry as a game with a deadly outcome.

⁴¹³ In her critique of Viacheslav Ivanov’s *Dionis i Pradionisiistvo*, Nina Braginskaia points out that in Aristotle’s texts the word “*katharsis*” is associated with ritual purification but once: in the *Poetics*, where it pertains to Orestes’ ritual cleansing after the matricide, and where it is an Apollonian, not a Dionysian, rite. Aristotle discusses *katharsis* as an emotional experience caused by ritual music in *Politics*, reserving it, however, for the spectators among the lower classes. Braginskaia argues that Aristotle’s discussion of tragedy in *Poetics* is consistent not with the idea of *katharsis* as purification, but as understanding and clarity (*katharôs gnônai*). She argues brilliantly, that since the plot of a tragedy was a mimetic representation of an ancient myth, recognition of the old legend in the new plot provided “*katharsis*”—the clarity of recognition. N. Braginskaia, “Tragedy and Ritual in Viacheslav Ivanov” in S. Braginskii, G.A. Zograf, et al. (eds.), *Arkhaicheskii ritual v fol’klornykh i ranneliteraturnykh paniatnikakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), 319-323.

It is unlikely, though not impossible, that Mandelshtam researched the issue in the way Braginskaia has, and anticipated her theory. He may have simply intuited the idea. In any case, his concept of *katharsis* disputes Ivanov’s and resonates with Braginskaia’s.

totality.” The concept of anamnesis as it figures in the essay “Scriabin and Christianity” is central in the process of transforming the tragic into the epic.

A game is motivated by purpose rather than cause. The purpose of the game of art is to remember. But: “To die is to remember, to remember is to die... To remember whatever the cost! To defeat forgetting—even at the cost of death: this is Scriabin’s motto and the heroic motivation of his art.” [“umeret’ znachit vspomnit’, vspomnit’ znachit umeret’... Vspomnit’ vo chto by to ni stalo! Poborot’ zabvenie,—khotia by eto stoilo smerti: vot deviz Skriabina, vot geroicheskoe ustremlenie ego iskusstva!"]. Two conclusions may be drawn from this statement. First, Scriabin’s death catalyzes the rediscovery of the integrity and immortality of the self. Since it is a sacrifice, Mandelshtam describes his music as “heroically motivated,” foreshadowing his concept of the “heroic era in the life of the word.” Second, the same rediscovery occurs in anamnesis, when the self dies and is resurrected: transformed, but intact.

The “most real act of redemption” absolves not only the person, but the word, rescinding any need for Ivanov’s “*a realibus ad realiora*.” Mandelshtam represents the integrity of the word with the help of images that will reemerge in his work in later years, and that I have analyzed above. In this essay, however, he explicates how the “clear” sign relates to time: “The mountain lake of Christian music formed after the profound transformation that turned Hellas into Europe [...]” [“Gornoe ozero khristianskoi muzyki obrazovalos’ posle glubokogo perevorota, prevrativshego Elladu v Evropu.”] As a “cross-section of time” and “crystallized eternity,” it is bound with the Christian understanding of time: “Christian eternity is a Kantian category, bisected with the sword of a seraph.” [“khristianskaia vechnost’ eto kantovskaia kategoriia, rassechennaia mehom serafima.”] Embedded in melody, harmony is eternity within sound. The same can be said about visual perspective as it figures in “Word and Culture,” Mandelshtam’s

“Armenian poems,” or in the aforementioned chapter of “The Noise of Time.” A chorus of previous interpretations is present in the speaker’s voice: a verse by Mandelshtam refers to Catullus, who refers to the Greeks, or Mandelshtam recalls Nedobrovo, who reads a verse by Tyutchev, whose verse culminates in the Alps as the symbolic vanishing point and source of clarity. These voices manifest within the single subjective utterance, as harmony or perspective in sound and image respectively.

The “epic gesture” of Mandelshtam’s poetics is based on the idea of anamnesis as the metaphoric equivalent of the Christian redemptive sacrifice. Since only a totality can recognize the unfamiliar within itself as itself, anamnesis as a metaphor of resurrection is one of the ways in which the deity conveys its own indestructible nature. Therefore, spontaneous memory is the experiential equivalent of Lukács’ idea that the epic is a form that becomes aware of its own totality.

Mandelshtam’s clarity is a dual phenomenon. As the emblem of a “transitive” logos, it is the recurrent original, described in “Word and Culture” as always new, like the first tendrils of green grass, yet filled with both the past and the future. It is associated with a spontaneous restitution of memory, although Mandelshtam, as an Acmeist, of course does not equate spontaneity with effortlessness, to the contrary. The effort of memory yields instances of rupture, such as acts of misspeaking or misquoting that individualize what would otherwise be impersonal transmission of information. This type of clarity is also associated with Classicism, which Mandelshtam understands as a poetic modality that periodically recreates itself. Like the “classical” word, the “classical” subject is as partial and specific to its time and place, as it is universal and eternal. Mandelshtam references harmony in “Scriabin and Christianity” and perspective in “Word and Culture” to represent the individual word as a “thousand-reed pipe”

that voices a “glossolalia”: a plural subjectivity that is integrated and articulated by one unifying voice. Finally, this kind of clarity pertains to the spoken word and to the interlocutor to whom it is directed.

While Mandelstam’s Catullus establishes continuity where there is a “sign of rupture,” his Orpheus interrupts “primordial” incessancy in order to attain the possibility of articulation. Catullus’s “claras urbes” are the recurring origin of the word in the unknown, as well as a homecoming to language as this very unknown. If, as Mandelstam writes in “The Noise of Time,” he views his biographical “origin”—his family—as inarticulate, then language is the other “origin,” within which he seeks to ground himself. In “Silentium” this “other” referred to Florence and the Renaissance, in the passage from “Word and Culture” it refers to an ancient Roman. In both instances, the aesthetic of articulation as a “home” is associated with Italy.

The “Lethean poems” address clarity of a different kind. Their hero enters the space of rupture, to discover it as the place where the word “gestates” but can never quite obtain materiality: “And slowly it grows, a tent or a temple, / Shoots past itself like a mad Antigone [...]” Whereas “transitive” clarity is associated with the speech act, this solitary and “intransitive” experience precedes the very possibility of speech, and could be described as a descent into the “inner image” of language. The statement “to die is to remember, to remember is to die” encapsulates both of these approaches to clarity. Mandelstam conceptualizes the poetic logos as possessing both properties at the same time.

Mandelstam’s “Epic Gesture” in the 1930s

The poet’s writing on clarity before and in the early 1920s abounds in references to Classical culture. By the 1930s his poetics reflects a very different aesthetic, yet the issue of clarity persists, still in relation to the debates surrounding the crisis of Symbolism. Clarity

becomes an emblem of a generational quest for the logos regardless of the specifics of the debate itself. Mandelshtam's poems from the 1930s that mention clarity refer to an archetypal poet who represents, even personifies a generation, referencing Bely, Kuzmin, Ivanov and of course Mandelshtam himself.

An example of such synthesis can be gleaned from Mandelshtam's poem on Bely's death, "The Morning of January 10, 1934." In this poem clarity appears as a feature of Bely's physical appearance, while his speech is both "direct" and "entangled" or "convoluted": "Where is that bright figure? / Where the directness of his speeches, entangled like honest zigzags [...]" ["Gde iasnyi stan? / Gde priamizna rechei, zaputannykh kak chestnye zigzagi ..."] Bely believed the body got in the way of clarity as he understood it. Ironically, his contemporaries noted that his physical presence effused light, while his prose, for all its obvious merits, does not invite similar praise.⁴¹⁴ Mandelshtam restores Bely to the physicality that he wished to shed, at the exact moment when he actually shed it. In the verse immediately following the verse above, the poet likens the vigor of Bely's speech to the ice-skater's energetic movement as he glides along the frozen surface. The imagery of the poem insists on making the poet, as well as the poet's speech a concrete, palpable, physical experience.

Mandelshtam also depicts Bely as larger-than-life, an equal to Dante or Goethe in literary imagination, or to Nietzsche in the manner Bely envisioned him:

And he bore the branching of European thought
as only the mighty could:
Rachel gazed into the mirror of being,
While Leah sang and wove a wreath.

I evropeiskoi mysli razvetlen'e
On perenes, kak lish' mogushchii mog:
Rakhil' gliadela v zerkalo iavlen'ia,
A Liia pela i plela venok.

⁴¹⁴ Nadezhda Mandelshtam observed in her memoirs, translated into English as *Hope Against Hope*: "He seemed to radiate light, and I have never met anyone else who was so literally luminous. Whether this effect was produced by his eyes, or by the constant flow of his ideas, it is hard to say, but he charged everybody who came near him with a sort of intellectual electricity." Nadezhda Mandelshtam, *Hope Against Hope* (London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1971), 155.

While Mandelshtam portrays both Bely and Dante as geniuses of synthesis, in this verse it is he who reconciles antagonists. The last lines of the stanza above refer to Dante's *Purgatorio* XVII, wherein just before the pilgrim enters Eden, he dreams of Rachel and Leah. The former looks in the mirror, while the latter sings and gathers flowers. They are usually interpreted as the contemplative and the active tendencies in Western thought, both representing also ways of living a righteous life. Deliberately or not, these lines recall Kuzmin's *Wings*, whose protagonist, Vanya Smurov, also reads *Purgatorio*. He reads Canto XVIII, where, immediately following his dream, the pilgrim enters Terrestrial Paradise and encounters a beautiful woman who also gathers flowers on a riverbank and tells him about the two rivers of Eden: Lethe, to wipe away memories of sins, and Eunoe, to secure the soul's memory of its good deeds. She is Matilda, and her identity has always puzzled interpreters, and it is therefore appropriate that Vanya, too, is stumped. He believes she might represent "active life," like Leah, about whom he read in the previous canto. But his tutor instructs him not to bother with pedantic exegesis. "Understand simply and beautifully" [*ponimaite prosto i krasivo*"], she says.⁴¹⁵ In other words, understand *clearly*, reconciling and deriving meaning from what initially may appear incompatible, the way the protagonist in Mandelshtam's poem understands the rich and conflicted heritage of European culture, and the way Mandelshtam reconciles the dispute on clarity.

The connection with Kuzmin may appear farfetched, but the first stanza of the following poem in the cycle is rife with "Kuzminian" prosody and imagery.

When the soul—so in a rush, so timid—
is suddenly faced with the depth of events,
She runs a twisting trail—
But death for her is an unclear path.

Kogda dushe stol' toropkoi, stol' robkoi
Predstanet vdrug sobytii glubina,
Ona bezhit viiushcheiusia tropkoi—
No smerti ei tropina ne iasna.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁵ Kuzmin, *PE* 1:93.

⁴¹⁶ Mandel'shtam, *PSS* 1:192-193.

The image of the soul running along a path unequivocally references Kuzmin even when it appears in Mandelshtam's "When Psyche-Life descends to shades..." Here, Psyche who is also presumably Bely's soul, faces the dilemma she has already confronted in the "Lethan poems": all paths are clear except the paths of dying. Kuzminian overtones end here: the rest of the poem addresses sound as Bely's principle theme and culminates in the image of a mask—reminiscent of Pushkin's death mask with its "enlarged lips" and "fortified affection" ["*dlia ukрупnennykh gub/ dlia ukreplennoi laski*"], and of course Orpheus.⁴¹⁷ Bely's portrait incorporates the features of Kuzmin, his longtime antagonist, but transcends them both. It is not by chance that Mandelshtam recalls the issue of clarity against the background of the Soviet 1930s. His protagonist embodies the old debate as it plumbs new depths: the issue at stake is the writing of an alternate history—at once a record of the generational effort to speak and an active enactment of this effort amidst calamity. In this context the tension between the spoken and the written word comes to the fore in a new light, for it is the spoken, not the written or printed word that would necessarily have to embody this alternate history.

In Mandelshtam's final body of work poems that address clarity—such as the poems on Bely's death, "Don't compare, a living being is incomparable..." ["*Ne sravnivai, zhivushchii nesravnim*"], "At the heart of the era I am an unclear path" ["*Ia v serdtse veka—put' neiasen*"], and especially the late masterpiece "Poem about the Unknown Soldier"—feature a hero who

⁴¹⁷ There no room here for a separate discussion of this poem, but I would like to note that it is in fact a model of the "intransitive" logos, very much in step with "The Swallow." It describes sound, presumably made by the first violin, because it leads, alone, and then turns inward on itself, and flows back into the bow. Poignantly, it gushes forth with no apparent origin, or an origin unto itself. Beautiful variations on the sound "l" from the Russian verb "to pour" ["*lit'sia*"] and the noun "caress" or "tenderness" ["*laska*"] deliver this flowing sound to the concluding image of the mask as its extension, and as the visual representation of what should be the source of the voice, but what instead appears to be its careful creation. The poem is a stunning variation on the image of the logos, as it is first described in "Word and Culture" and as it appears at the end of "The Swallow."

personifies the past and gives it life in the present. While these poems are profoundly and self-consciously tragic, their commemorative impulse belongs to the epic. Even as the hero mourns the demise of clarity, his singular voice embodies the “glossolalia” of memory. As the “epic gesture” emerges on the level of the narrative, it redeems tragedy through anamnesis. A metaphoric resurrection becomes a literal, textual resurrection of poets’ voices. In this sense, the “Poem about the Unknown Soldier” represents the original epic narrative— not because it is a story of genesis, but because its narrator, the “unknown soldier,” exchanges his name for collective memory, literally “dying to remember.”

The poem describes the narrator’s flight away from war-torn Earth. As Omry Ronen observed, this flight originates in a book by a nineteenth-century astronomer, Camille Flammarion. The protagonist of his popular *Astronomie Populaire* flies from the Earth faster than the speed of light, explaining phenomena of the physical universe as he does so.⁴¹⁸ As Mandelshtam’s hero does the same, he speeds past visions of the past, witnessing vast panoramas of violence from the battles of World War I to Napoleonic campaigns. In fact, the very substance of the light beam appears to be the “unknown soldiers”’ lives. In the last lines of the poem, the hero arrives on the shores of Lethe, to take his place among those of his generation, who already wait there.

Clarity appears in the poem twice, and both times is most immediately associated with Bely. Mandelshtam describes the demise of an infantry [*pekhotā*], and then the clatter of wooden crutches as they trot the globe. In the following stanza the globe transforms into a skull:

A skull develops from life
Across the entire forehead from temple to temple
He teases himself with the seams' purity

Razvivaetsia cherep ot zhizni
Vo ves lob ot viska do viska
Chistotoi svoikh shvov on draznit sebia

⁴¹⁸ Ronen, “K Suzhetu ‘Stikhov o Neizvestnom Soldate’ Mandel’shtama,” *Slavica Hierosolymitana* IV, Jerusalem (1979): 214-222.

Reminiscent of a church dome, it shows clear
It foams with thought—dreams of its own self
—the cup of cups, the homeland to the homeland
A cap sewn with a starry stitch—
A nightcap of happiness—a father of Shakespeare.

Ash tree clarity and sycamore vigilance
Something reddish races home.

Pominauiushchim kupolom iasnitsia
Mysl'iu penitsia—sam sebe snitsia
—Chasha chash i otchizna otchizne
Zvezdnym rubchikom shityi chepets—
Chepchik schast'ia—Shekspira otets.

Iasnost' iasenevaia i zorkost' iavorovaia
Chut'-chut' krasnaia mchitsia v svoi dom [...] ⁴¹⁹

The skull as a *memento mori* and a symbol of the world—evoking “poor Yorick” and the head of an infant—is reminiscent of Bely’s *Notes of the Eccentric*, whose protagonist experiences metaphoric decapitation in the process of Orphic initiation. As aforementioned, Bely’s narrator compares his head to a cupola. The “ash tree clarity” [*iasnost' iasenevaia*] likewise recalls Bely, whose *Glossolalia* features an entry on the word “clarity” [*iasnost'*] and its etymological connection to the Russian word “*iasen*” or the ash. Boris Gasparov argues that these lines pertain to Sergei Esenin’s suicide and the grim fact that he wrote his last poem in his own blood. Gasparov suggests that as Mandelshtam’s narrator flies away from the Earth, he encounters the dead poet.⁴²⁰ I venture the suggestion that the primary reference here is to Bely, though Esenin is present as well. Mandelshtam’s remarkable achievement in this poem is to synthesize numerous voices of his generation and create a collective portrait and memorial with numerous allusions condensed into just a few words.

The concluding chapter of Bely’s *Glossolalia* deserves a closer look in connection to Mandelshtam’s verses above.

Eurythmy carries the imprint of free clarity, bravery, sobriety, new science and dance; the fleet-footed dancer is he who clothed train of thought in rhythmical ornaments: he is “Zarathustra.”

⁴¹⁹ Mandel'shtam, *PSS* 1:228-231; 230-231.

⁴²⁰ B. Gasparov, “Smert' v Vozdukhe,” *Literaturnye Leitmotivy: Ocherki Russkoi Literatury XX Veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1994), 213-240, 232-233.

And the fleet-footed thoughts of the *gay science* come not in the poetic meter of treatises, but in a swarm of flyers playing with scarves:

-I saw them in a white hall worked with carving: beneath a dome glowing turquoise [...] they've been hammering on oak for years (yes, years!); but, growing younger, they poured out their light in a pure swell of planets. Perhaps at that time a hurricane volley of shots rumbled; and corpses fell; but these pure hands and the glowing turquoise dome—took off as prayer—to the throne of He, Who gazes with sadness at the horrors, the battles, the floods of curses, millions of tortured dead bodies, tormented by life; and I understood the brotherhood of peoples: in the mimicking dance.

On the folds of raised arms
The builder sound erects churches.

S. Esenin.

[...] Let there be indeed the brotherhood of peoples: the language of languages will tear languages to pieces; and—the second coming of the Word will be accomplished.

Na evritmii pechat' volnoi iasnosti, smelosti, trezvosti, novoi nauki i tantsa; pliasun legkonogii est' tot, kto oblek khody mysli v ornament ritma: on est' "Zaratustra."
I legkonogie mysli *veseloi nauki* griadut ne stropoiu *traktatov*, a poem letunii, igraiuschikh sharfami:

-videl ia ikh v belom zale reznom: pod biriuzeiushchim kupolom [...] stuchat molotkami po dubu oni uzhe goda (da, goda!!); no, iuneia, oni izlivali svoi svet v chistoi zybi planet. Mozhet byt', v to vremia gremeli ogni uragannogo zalpa; i padali trupy; no eti chistye ruki i biriuzeiushchii kupol—vzletali molitvoi—k prestolu Togo, Kto s pechal'iu vziraet na uzhasy, boiniu, potopy klevet, million istrezannykh trupov, zamuchennykh zhiznei; i bratstvo narodov ia ponial: v mimicheskom tantse.

Na krepkikh sgibakh vzdetykh ruk
Vozvodit tserkvi stroitel' zvuk.
S. Esenin.

[...] Da budet zhe bratstvo narodov: iazyk iazykov razorvet iazyki; i—sovershitsia vtoroe prishestvie Slova.⁴²¹

Here, Nietzsche (who according to Gasparov is important for the “Poem about the Unknown Soldier”), images of World War I, the cupola of Steiner’s theosophic temple in Switzerland, a quote by Esenin, and, of course, clarity all play their part. The final stanzas of Mandelshtam’s poem contain most of the imagery in this paragraph, but the minor details are most telling. For example, both poets use the verb “to hammer” [stuchat’]: Bely—to describe the hammering of the builders of the temple, Mandelshtam—to create the remarkable image of a “tribe” of destitute

⁴²¹ Belyi, *Glossolalia*, 120-121.

war invalids who trot the globe on crutches. Bely's lofty vision is undone: instead of building the movement the vision is of dissipation. Similarly, Bely uses the tautological "iazyk iazykov" to describe the second advent of the Logos, while Mandelshtam employs tautology to describe its undoing. For example, obviously tautological—and an obvious echo of the argument on clarity—is the image of the skull as the world. "*Iasnost' iasenevaia*," pertaining to the same argument, is here not a quality of phenomenal appearance, the way Ivanov would have it, but the light of the word, the way both Bely and Kuzmin interpreted it: it is vision as being and being as vision, synonymous with the life of things. In addition to referencing Bely's magical dictionary definition of clarity, it recalls also Mandelshtam's own "Word and Culture," where the poet describes the impending destruction of the old world: "Stop? What for? Who will stop the sun, when it races in its sparrow traces to the paternal house, shod with a thirst for return?"⁴²² Mandelshtam's tautology conveys the idea of being as it undoes itself. The skull as the world that dreams itself ["sam sebe snitsia"], and is its own "cup of cups, and the homeland to the homeland" ["chasha chash i otchizna otchizne"], transforms into the terrifying head that consumes itself: "Is it I who with no choice drink this brew, / eat my own head under fire." This image reverses the Symbolist understanding of the word as a metonymic extension and icon of the invisible origin, and undoes Kuzmin's clarity as individual perspective based on love as the ultimate "prototype."

In his *An Approach to Mandelshtam*, Omry Ronen describes the "Poem about the Unknown Soldier" as reminiscent of Viacheslav Ivanov's concept of the tragedy. The scholar likens the poem to "a choral dithyramb" and a "funerary oration with its closing vision of sacrifice, the immortal record of light, and the Heraclitan judgment of centuries by all-embracing

⁴²² Mandel'shtam, *PSS* 2:49.

fire.” According to Ronen, this poem realizes Ivanov’s call for “the dirge of the self-abnegating but not yet realized spirit.”⁴²³ Ronen quotes from Ivanov’s “Crisis of Individualism” (1905) in which the poet proclaims the end of the age of the epic as the “Apolline” genre, associated with individualism, and enthusiastically invites the age of the “choral dithyramb.”⁴²⁴ Ronen’s point is well-made: the ending of the poem, wherein the pilgrim arrives on the shores of Lethe, takes his place among those already waiting there—presumably, all the dead poets of the past, or perhaps those of his great contemporaries, who were dead by 1937. As the centuries encircle him in fire, he responds to the roll call with “bloodless” lips, pronouncing the year of his birth, but, poignantly, not his name.⁴²⁵ Ronen’s point appears to be self-evident: this is, indeed, a lament, “a vision of sacrifice,” both Orphic and Christian. But in fact the central theme of the poem is not sacrifice for its own sake, and certainly not for the sake of shedding one’s individuality to embrace its alternative. The Unknown Soldier commemorates innumerable lost lives and allows them entry into history. His death creates an alternative history: a record of the many voices that would otherwise be lost. He becomes the unknown, so as to verbalize collective memory. If in the “Lethan poems,” Orpheus follows the forgotten word—the “unknown” object—into the space of forgetting, he now loses his individual name in order to be able to become the “flesh” of memory. This is why in the final lines of the poem his lips are “bloodless”: the words, not the body, are now his “flesh.”

⁴²³ Ronen, *An Approach to Mandelstam*, 198-199.

⁴²⁴ This may be a far-fetched connection, however it is worth noting that Ivanov’s insistence on the end of the age of the epic is a reference to Lermontov’s ironic “The age of epic poems has passed” [“*Umchalsya vek epicheskikh poem*”] from his *Detskaia skazka*. Lermontov’s presence is important to the poem, he is clearly one of Mandelshtam’s “unknown soldiers.” Perhaps the epic gesture of this poem is meant as a response not only to Ivanov, but Lermontov as well.

⁴²⁵ Gasparov, “Smert’ v Vozdukhe”, 237.

While the poem refers to Ivanov's ideas, Mandelshtam never anticipates, let alone welcomes the "Dionysian" disintegration of the individual in the collective ecstasy of destruction. Nor is it correct to read his poetry as a "chorus" in Ivanov's sense of the word. In his writing, the multitude obtains voice only as it is "interpreted" by the individual. As early as his "classical" period of the late 1910s and early 1920s, such representations of wholeness as the "virgin forest" or the "virgin soil of time," or a distinctly classical "Psyche"—refer to a plurality of voices as they emerge in individual memory. This also applies to the "Poem to the Unknown Soldier," with the difference that now the integration of numerous previous poetic instances, as well as the verbalization of the unspeakable witnessed by the narrator as he collides with the past, come at the price of his extinction. The "epic" author is not one whose name has been simply lost to history, but one who has exchanged the literal for the metaphoric, and the personal for the universal. Only this action can give voice to the collective. Whereas in "Scriabin and Christianity" the poet offered a retrospective meditation on the meaning of Scriabin's—and also Pushkin's—death, and a metaphysical approach to anamnesis as the creative act at the heart of the art-making process, in the "Unknown Soldier" he writes about a conscious decision. This is an imitation of Christ in earnest. Consequently, the outcome is the preservation of wholeness rather than disintegration.

The poem combines the notions of "intransitive" and "transitive" clarity. As the narrator flies away from the Earth, he collides with powerful images of war, as light itself appears to be saturated with them. This colliding motion of image and sound—the narrator's verbalizing his vision—is an emblem of intransitivity that requires endless clarification. The image of the poet's lips that fly at once away from and toward the sky saturated with "wholesale" deaths captures this idea:

Incorruptible, trenched sky—
Sky of massive wholesale deaths—
After you, away from you—in your entirety
My lips sweep me along in the dark.

Nepodkupnoe nebo okopnoe—
Nebo krupnykh optovykh smertei-
Za toboi, ot tebia—tselokupnoe
Ia gubami nesus' v temnote.⁴²⁶

The word cannot catch up with the meaning: the very idea of movement has lost meaning. Yet this implosion enables memory. The hero personifies it: Mandelshtam's Orpheus is a tribute to the argument on clarity as the specific relationship between "self" and "world." The figure of Orpheus becomes the needle that threads into the 1930s a conversation from the 1920s, the 1910s, and the period 1904-1905. Presented as a calamitous ending of this debate, in fact it is a recapitulation and extension into the future. The final words of the poem are addressed to an invisible interlocutor, one who is real in so far as the words spoken by the narrator are real, because "only a reality calls forth another reality."

In conclusion, I would like to revisit my thesis that for Mandelshtam clarity is inseparable from the spoken word, and that it is therefore inseparable from the body as a physical reality. The "epic gesture" of his poetics always emphasizes the effort to verbalize, and therefore implies both sound and body, and their relationship as the frontier whereupon culture in the broadest sense of the word is formed. In this way the poet always engages and challenges Bely's approach to the logos. It is not by chance that the final lines of the "Poem to the Unknown Soldier" refer to the speaker's lips and his whisper. As Orpheus who stands on the brink of forgetting—and so again upon the liminal "path of the mysteries"—he insists on the spoken word as the embodiment of memory. The speaker's lips are bloodless because the spoken word is now the body of memory. Unlike Bely, who appeared to his contemporaries as a luminous embodiment of thought, and believed in earnest that the body must be made subject to the invisible,

⁴²⁶ Mandel'shtam, *PSS* 1:229.

Mandelstam seeks to make the word physical. Bely disparaged the body as the site of the “thoughts of the world,” while for Mandelshtam, like for Kuzmin, it is the source of clarity and coherence. Earlier, in 1936, he writes a poem that begins with the following verse:

<p>Not as a powdery white butterfly will I return my borrowed remains to the earth— I want the thinking body to be turned into a street, a country...</p>	<p>Ne muchnistoi babochkoiu beloi V zemliu ia zaemnyi prakh vernu— ia khochu, chtob mysliaashchee telo prevratilos' v ulitsu, v stranu...⁴²⁷</p>
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The poem concludes with a vision of infantrymen that march by carrying the “exclamation marks” of the rifles, and the following lines:

<p>Comrades from the latest call-up walked in their work in harsh skies, The infantry went silently by, exclamations of rifles on their shoulders.</p> <p>And thousands of anti-aircraft guns— Whether eyes were brown or blue— they went in disorder—people, people,-- Who, then, will continue for them?</p>	<p>Shli tovarishchi poslednego prizyva Po rabote v zhestkikh nebesakh, Pronesla pekhota molchalivo Vosklitsan'ia ruzhei na plechakh.</p> <p>I zenitnikh tysiachi orudii— Karikh to zrachkov il' golubykh— Shli nestroino—liudi, liudi, liudi,— Kto zhe budet prodolzhat' za nikh?</p>
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The image of the “thinking body” in the first stanza responds to Bely’s desire to eliminate it. It is a perfect metaphor for the “epic gesture” of Mandelshtam’s poetics, complete with the statement of the desire to “incarnate” collective experience, rather than a claim of having achieved it. The verses where the narrator witnesses thousands of nameless soldiers marching to war presage the “Poem to the Unknown Soldier,” where in the final verses of the poem the narrator lines up with them all on the shores of Lethe. Metonymy as the idea of extension and continuation is operative in both poems. The question “who will continue for them” [“kto budet prodolzhat' za nikh?”] finds its answer in the later poem. Mandelshtam will have earned his

⁴²⁷ Mandel'shtam, *PSS* 1:207.

rightful place among those who have made their solitary passage into silence so as to give their voice to a multitude that would otherwise remain mute.

Conclusion

In his *Poets of Divine Love*, Alessandro Vettori observes that the idiom of prevarication originates in the Garden of Eden, in the first instance of Adam's speech after the Fall. He writes: "There is no direct correlation between Yahweh's question: "Where are you?" and Adam's reply: "I heard the sound of you in the garden...I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."⁴²⁸ Ashamed of his nudity, Adam doesn't just cover his body but cloaks his speech in ambiguity, thereby forfeiting the primordial bond between being and language. It is at this moment that Eden is lost: the subsequent physical expulsion is merely a confirmation of this fact. The language of postlapsarian exile is defined by two conflicting drives: for the clarity, originally possessed but relinquished by Adam, and for the wisdom that he now seeks perpetually. In accordance with Said's concept of an "intransitive" and a "transitive" beginning, the former turns inward in the effort to remember the forgotten idiom, while the latter looks toward the horizon in order to uncover the secrets of being and convey them in accordance with *their* clarity.⁴²⁹ But while both strive to bridge the separation between being and the word, both cannot escape equivocation.

During the 1910 polemic on the "crisis of Symbolism" Mikhail Kuzmin's essay "On Beautiful Clarity," followed by Viacheslav Ivanov's explicit definition of clarity as empirical intelligibility, brought into play three distinct versions of the poetic word, formulated according to the core principles of the participants' respective poetics and the philosophical and aesthetic views that informed them. Each of the three models of clarity represents a "beginning" either in the *word* as an expression and conduit of being, in *being* as an object located beyond the word's immediate grasp, or, in the case of Osip Mandelstam, a synthesis of the two approaches. Yet the

⁴²⁸ Vettori, *Poets of Divine Love: Franciscan Mystical Poetry of the Thirteenth Century*, xvii.

⁴²⁹ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*.73.

major implications of the debate were not immediately apparent to the participants themselves. While the concept of clarity as a specific model of the “creative form” implicitly informed each of their views, it evaded explicit definition.

The notion of clarity figured in Kuzmin’s and Ivanov’s writing years before “On Beautiful Clarity” appeared in print. Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century Kuzmin’s letters and Ivanov’s essays and diary entries made references to clarity not only as the idea of “transparency of meaning” or the “French” *clarté*, but also as a kind of “mood” or state of mind. These references evoked a specific set of issues and associations that came to the fore and became contentious when in “The Precepts of Symbolism” Ivanov posed the question about the word’s sufficiency and adequacy to reason. The problem of clarity as it was discussed after Kuzmin’s essay appeared in *Apollon* and during the later polemic on the pages of *Works and Days* pertained to the basic relationship between the self and the word, and to the relationship between the word and the image. When the same set of issues reemerged in Mandelshtam’s response to the polemic in the 1920s and again in the late 1930s, the poet added the juxtaposition between the sound of the word and the image as its semantic content. For Ivanov, Kuzmin and Mandelshtam these relationships play out across a wide array of aesthetic, cultural and historical associations. But as their individual interests and tastes changed over time, their understanding of how these relationships are structured did not. Even as it evolved, the poetic identity of each author was entwined with these more or less unchanging structures.

Ivanov, Kuzmin and Mandelshtam associated clarity with Classicism in a variety of its interpretations in the West. Among these the Enlightenment concept of clarity as an attribute and measure of reason was important. Rejection, modification, or acceptance of this idea helped the poets formulate their individual definitions of clarity. Ivanov’s utter rejection of the “*clarté*” as

the word's "communicability" and "adequacy to reason" was rooted in his skeptical view of nineteenth century rationalism, which he held accountable for the decadence and disarray of his contemporary society. Ivanov placed his faith in the power of language to recall its spiritual foundations, and in the idea that philology as the history of a language held the answer to the religious dilemmas of his day. The poetics of insight that resulted from his endeavor to "invent the new and inherit the old" needed the concept of *clarté* to provide the necessary tension as something against which to struggle. As an Enlightenment concept, clarity signified the distinction between the subject and the ultimately unknowable "thing-in-itself." For Ivanov, it came to represent individuation, which he understood as alienation of the self from the world, and the artist from his means of expression. This was the limitation that Ivanov's "identity poetics" perpetually strove to overcome. To this end, Ivanov superimposed the Classical distinction between the subject and the object on the Nietzschean dichotomy between Apollo and Dionysus, and interpreted this dialectical relationship in religious terms. Apollonian "clarity," which Ivanov associated as much with the visible reality as he did with logic, was now the "veil," but also the self-sacrifice and self-abnegation of the invisible and unknowable "original" Dionysian principle.

Ivanov not only believed he had discovered the Dionysian origins of Western culture as a historical fact, but also thought he had received mystical experience of this divine principle. The "identity poetics" that resulted from this experience intended to lift the "veil" of image and suggest a collapse of the distinction between the subject and the object, yet this poetics was predicated upon the very idea it critiqued: a subjective claim to knowledge. Only now the signifier of the unknowable and ineffable replaced the signifier of the world as an image. Ivanov's theurgic idiom originates in a revelation of being, marked as the "locus" of undisclosed

insight. Contrary to Ivanov's own statement about the word's non-correspondence to meaning, his poetry assumes that between the self and the word, and between the word and the image, there is not only a correspondence, but a continuity. For this reason, the protagonist in so many of Ivanov's texts is a traveler, who makes his way to the site of revelation and returns not only transformed but himself an agent of transformation.⁴³⁰ Predicated upon the idea of knowledge, Ivanov's poetics insinuates a metonymic relationship between the presumed site of revelation and the word that conveys this revelation.

Mikhail Kuzmin's interest in the notion of clarity predated his appearance on the literary arena. Rather, it emerged in the context of his religious pursuits when, as a young man, he was still in the process of defining himself. He formulated his concept of clarity in response to St. Paul's idea, articulated in the *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, that complete grasp of the truth must be deferred to the afterlife. St. Paul's iconic reference to vision as a "dark glass" inspired Kuzmin to want to reveal, in the present, the clear surface beneath layers of debris. Unlike for Ivanov, for Kuzmin the notion of clarity always pertained to a specific image rather than an abstract concept. The image of a clear surface signified the kind of wholeness of vision that emerges in the process of individuation and so implies separation.

During the period of Kuzmin's affiliation with the World of Art artists, as well as in the later years of the "crisis of Symbolism," he associated the concept of clarity with the aesthetic of Classicism as he interpreted it. The image that emerged out of his disagreement with St. Paul remained a constant in his texts, but obtained the function of a magical device that aids in the transformation of a copy into an original. In the context of this "magical" Classicism, clarity has several roles. In its capacity as an image it functions as a narrative device that propels the action.

⁴³⁰ In my dissertation: the Pont du Gard fragments, the essays on Goethe and Orpheus, the poem "Beauty" among others.

In *Wings*, for example, a series of windows and mirrors leads Vanya toward liberation and attainment of a new self. Additionally, the image of clarity as a surface transforms itself into the faux superficiality and nonchalance of Kuzmin's narrative voice. This "gliding" narrative style reflects the "Apollonian" aesthetic of the World of Art, as much as it is informed by Kuzmin's personal tastes and preferences for "lucid" writers ranging from Apuleius, to Pushkin, to Anatole France. Kuzmin puts this quality at the service of stylization so that the text itself becomes a "mirror" of a previous original. Not only is writing a kind of magical space that allows the protagonist to make his way toward a transformation into the original, but it is itself such an original, "reflected" in its antecedent. Finally, clarity is also that "French" attribute of good style that Ivanov understood as "transparency of meaning" and believed to be duplicitous. In fact, all of Kuzmin's interpretations of clarity engage with this definition: even his initial response to St. Paul's *Epistle* could be read as an appeal to reason. Yet the Enlightenment *clarté* interested Kuzmin as an artistic rather than a philosophical phenomenon. In his later essays he made sure to point out the local, individual character of the French "universalist" aesthetic, and it is in the capacity of a specific style that it appealed to him.

Kuzmin's "beautiful clarity" does indeed dissimulate, though in a way that differs from Ivanov's understanding of this idea. The secondary and tertiary "concealed" meanings of Kuzmin's texts, their complexity and richness do not in some ultimate analysis reveal the word's inadequacy, as Ivanov would have it, quite to the contrary. Kuzmin's "metaphysics of transparency" is predicated upon an understanding of difference and even "otherness" that is completely foreign to Ivanov's poetics. Indeed, it is possible to conceive of Kuzmin's clarity as a kind of conceptual and visual representation of the otherwise elusive notion of differentiation. For characters such as Vanya Smurov, clarity is the ability to distinguish between the initial self,

predetermined by his biographical narrative, and the free “original” identity that he attains with the help of a series of magical mirrors. The implications of the idea that mimesis is an instrument of differentiation, that metaphor yields difference, is that language itself only appears to reproduce a primary reality, when in fact it creates it. Trust in the transformative, liberating power of language is the antidote to St. Paul’s devaluation of the present. Once the word is free of the obligation to be adequate to a fixed concept, even if this concept signifies “being,” the relationship between the word and the “image” ceases to be causative, and it is then that it actually becomes “adequate” in the poetic sense. Instead, the image and the word relate to each other in the same way as the narrator of the “Histoire édifiante” relates to his protagonist, or Vanya relates to his reflection in the mirror: spontaneously and metaphorically: as similar in their difference, and different in their similarity.

For Mandelshtam the concept of clarity was inextricably linked to a retrospective reconsideration of Ivanov’s and Kuzmin’s polemic in 1910 and 1912. His contribution to the debate during the actual “crisis of Symbolism,” however, did set the tone for his later reconsideration of this theme. In the poem “Silentium,” published at the height of the polemic, Mandelshtam countered Ivanov’s appeal to the ineffable by suggesting that separation from primordial unity is irrevocable. His poem, however, evoked an image of this primordial unity—Venus—without ever mentioning her directly. Although the poem declares her as yet “unborn,” it clearly yields her image. It therefore contradicts itself: the origin is lost, yet there it is, born from the verses. Moreover, since the poem alludes to an Italian Renaissance painting, this image appeals to Classical European heritage.

Henceforth, Mandelshtam’s poetic voice inhabits the space between the “origins” from which the poet has been severed—not only “primordial unity,” but also his Jewish roots from

which he willfully detached himself—and the tradition in which he sought to “originate.” In the essays “Word and Culture” and “On the Nature of the Word” Mandelshtam writes of “remembering” the Classical tradition on native soil. While the effort to remember is conscious, the remembrance itself is spontaneous. Mandelshtam mentions Ovid, Pushkin and Catullus as yet to be born, through anamnesis, in Russian poetry. They are the “clear cities” toward which he, like Catullus, directs his steps. Clarity is the horizon—both cultural and semantic—toward which the poet travels, but which appears in his own poetry by virtue of being in the distance. Desire of what has yet to come into existence brings this object into existence: the absence of this object is the condition of its rebirth. Anamnesis as the spontaneous restitution of the “old” as “new” compensates for the tragic separation, be it from one’s roots, from a literary tradition, from the native tongue, etc. Spontaneous memory allows for an alternative kind of continuity, one that originates in one’s trust that the unknown will yield the right word. Reason is made spontaneously.

This idea of clarity engages polemically with both Ivanov and Kuzmin. Mandelshtam removes the notion of an a priori “being” or “original principle” that, according to Ivanov, language must address. But he also makes his poetry confront the unknown in a way that Kuzmin’s poetry never does. In Mandelshtam’s writing “Kuzminian” playful spontaneity of the word collides with a destructive Dionysian force and discovers the former as a poetically intelligible reality. Moreover, since “logic is the kingdom of the unexpected” (according to the “Morning of Acmeism”), the word spontaneously reveals new “frontiers” of being. Mandelshtam interprets the mimetic function of the word as open, inclusive, and able to accommodate multiple variations and interpretations, and to engender continuity. The structure of the word itself is based in this dynamic. As Mandelshtam writes in “Word and Culture,” the word’s semantic

content and its sound are two elements that engender one another, and so form a unity, precisely because they are separate and distinct. In “On the Nature of the Word” Mandelshtam describes the word as *already* an image. Yet he also implies that the space between the word and the image enlivens language by allowing in a number of associations and potential meanings. His model of clarity as a “creative form” has the structure of a metaphor whose elements are not fixed in their place, but long to be reborn in each other, to co-create each other, to transform and multiply each other.

Notions of separation and anamnesis also define Mandelshtam’s understanding of the relationship between the poet and language. Separation from European culture, Classicism, and its ideal of wholeness and integrity is ultimately secondary to Mandelshtam’s implicit anxiety that the word itself is alien to the poet, and that he must strive to be reborn in it. But just as the relationship between the image and the word is open to a multitude of meanings, so the desire to be reborn in the word concerns more than Mandelshtam’s individual narrative. The “epic gesture” of his poetics comes to the fore in the 1930s, when the imperative to preserve one’s humanity as such prevails over the task of recreating European Classicism on native soil. But it is at this time, as Mandelshtam consciously gives voice to a multitude, that his Classicism reaches new heights. The very concept of humanity to which his work refers in poems such as the “Poem about the Unknown Soldier,” pertains to the Classical ideal as Mandelshtam’s understands it. The concept of clarity as it figures in this poem not only alludes to the polemic of the Silver Age, but, in the manner of the eighteenth century Classicism, it personifies humanity specifically in its capacity to reason. Unconcerned with the specifics of the debate on clarity, Mandelshtam represents it as a chapter in the history of Humanism.

The polemic about the word's adequacy to reason inspired Ivanov, Kuzmin and Mandelshtam to consider what an intelligible poetics might represent. The discussion proceeded in the form of several heated exchanges on the pages of *Apollon* and *Works and Days* in 1910 and again in 1912. But Ivanov's and Kuzmin's interest in this idea predated the debate itself, and persisted after it was over. Mandelshtam returned to clarity as late as the 1930s. The poets' preoccupation with this concept was driven by a self-reflexive interest in their individual versions of poetic intelligibility. Since the problem of origins permeates the polemic and is also present in the poets' individual reflections on the subject of clarity, the quest for intelligibility is really an effort to remember one's primary relationship with language. As a beginning, clarity is a topos: a place where sense is made, and where there is no contradiction between being and the word. All three poets associated this topos with specific geographical locations and historical periods, all of which were beyond one's immediate reach. Clarity was associated with those periods of European history that either did not affect Russia directly—such as Greek and Roman antiquity, or the Renaissance—or that were delayed in their arrival and stunted in their development, like the Enlightenment. Even Pushkin's poetics represented a paradigm of clarity in part because of its singularity and, in a sense, its foreignness to the Russian tradition. For Ivanov, Kuzmin and Mandelshtam Italy, in particular, was a signifier of Edenic beginning.

But beyond these specific cultural, historical and even geographic associations, clarity is also a structural topos: a primary *figure* of intelligibility from which their individual poetics proceeds. These are specific structures in the relationship between the poet and the word, the word and the image, and meaning and sound. For Ivanov, who sought the original idiom in being, clarity was structured metonymically, as the idea of connection between the word and its primordial origin. For Kuzmin the primary vehicle of intelligibility is a metaphor, the figure of

identity and difference. For him, clarity is spontaneous differentiation that occurs by means of language. Finally, for Mandelshtam clarity also originates in the word, and combines both figures. Since the relationship between the poet and the word, and the word and the image is that of dynamic transformation and rebirth as something else, it is structurally metaphoric. But Mandelshtam's preoccupation with memory, and so with continuity and contiguity, also renders it structurally metonymic.

These figures of intelligibility define some of the central images and concepts in Ivanov's, Kuzmin's and Mandelshtam's texts. Yet the poets themselves never addressed them directly. While these primary starting points are implicitly present in their work, they escaped their definition. Clarity as the topos of an Edenic beginning is always self-contained, in other words, intransitive. To interpret clarity is, inevitably, to equivocate.

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